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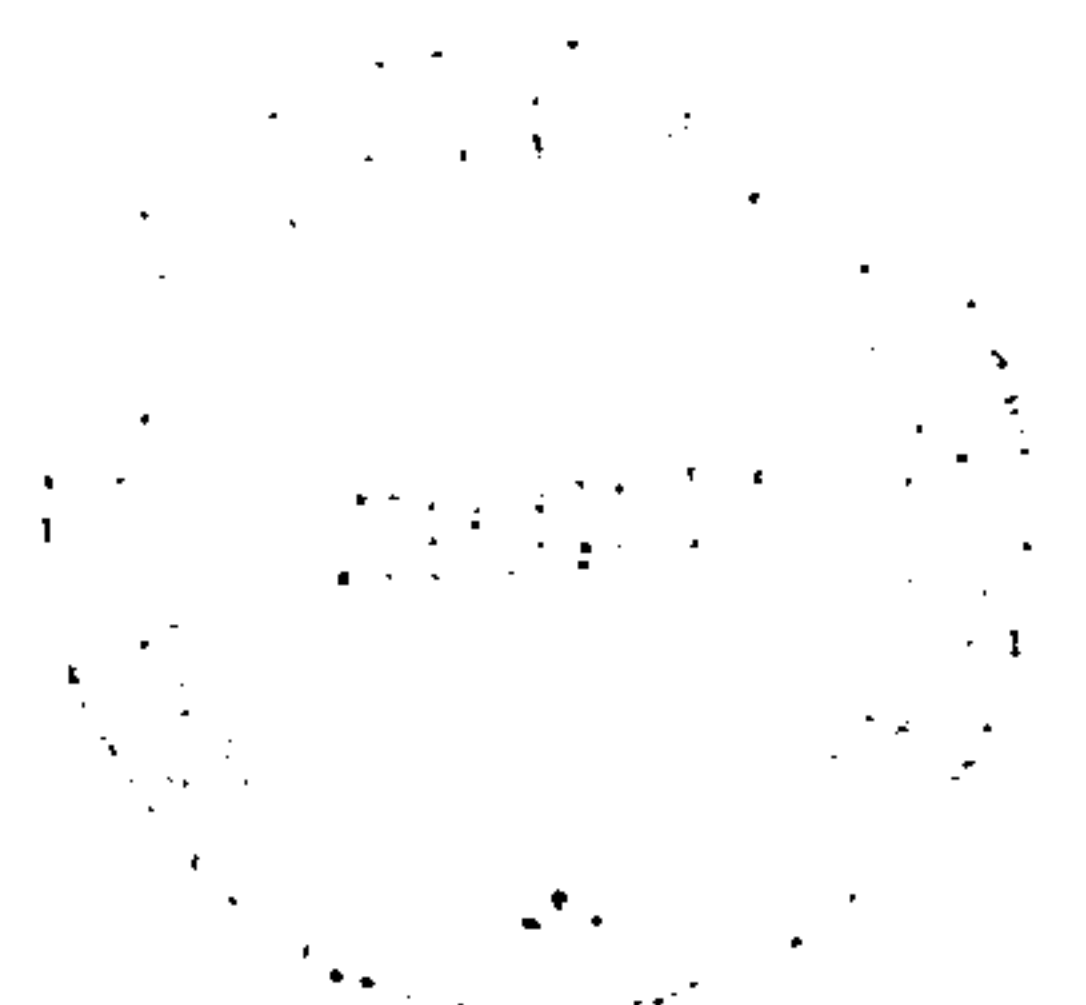
**Religious Intellectuals: The Poetic Gravity  
of Emily Brontë and Christina Rossetti**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the writing of Emily Brontë and Christina Rossetti in terms of its expression of religious culture and belief. It is my argument that Brontë and Rossetti experienced religion as intellectuals, questioning and exploring doctrine and dogma neither as sentimental lady Christians nor dismissive, secular critics. I contend that by close reading their poetry, the genre both women privileged as most appropriate for the consideration of religious matters, the reader may trace the sermons and theological works they read. Moreover, their writing, I suggest, evinces their intellectual response to theological, ecclesiological and ecclesiastical developments that took place in the nineteenth century. I thus label Brontë and Rossetti 'religious intellectuals,' a phrase suggestive of their intense understanding of, rather than their mild acquaintance with, religious debate. Many women writing within the nineteenth century found that religion granted them a field within which to freely read and research, but were denied the professional title of 'theologian.' Brontë and Rossetti are thus examples of a wider phenomenon wherein women encountered religion like scholars, one disregarded by current criticism unable as it is to categorize a female activity simultaneously religious and intellectual. I use Brontë and Rossetti as examples of what I call the 'religious intellectual' because they represent different sides of this classification. Where Brontë struggled away from her Methodist background, serving as a cultural commentator on its enthusiastic belief-system, Rossetti forged a scholarly identity as a late member of the High Church Oxford Movement. Both poets, I contend, wrote about religion in order to signal their intellectual ability. I conclude that Brontë's interest in Methodism and Rossetti's fascination with Tractarianism reveals the poets to be both independent of family pressures and false consciousness, and fully engaged with a subject central to their age.



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## Abbreviations

- A Christina Rossetti, *Angels* (London: S. P. C. K., 1910)
- AD Christina Rossetti, *Annus Domini: A Prayer for Each Day of the Year, founded on a Text of Holy Scripture* (Oxford and London: James Parker and Co., 1874)
- CS Christina Rossetti, *Called To Be Saints: The Minor Festivals Devotionally Studied* (London: S. P. C. K., 1881)
- FD Christina Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* [1892] (London: S. P. C. K., 1893)
- GMOP Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862), in *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition Volume I*, ed. R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), pp.9-91
- LS Christina Rossetti, *Letter and Spirit: Notes on the Commandments* (London: S. P. C. K., 1883)
- P Christina Rossetti, *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881), in *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition Volume II*, ed. R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp.57-164
- PP Christina Rossetti, *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866), in *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition Volume I*, ed. R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), pp.93-187
- PPP Christina Rossetti, *Privately Printed Poems* (n.d.), in *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition Volume III*, ed. R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp.61-114
- P, 1875 Christina Rossetti, *Poems Added in Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1875), in *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A*

- Variorum Edition Volume I*, ed. R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), pp.189-230
- P*, 1888 Christina Rossetti, *Poems Added in Poems* (1888, 1890), in *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition Volume II*, ed. R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp.165-178
- SF* Christina Rossetti, *Seek and Find: A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite* (London: S. P. C. K., 1879)
- TF* Christina Rossetti, *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (London: S. P. C. K., 1885)
- UP* Christina Rossetti, *Unpublished Poems* (n.d.), in *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition Volume III*, ed. R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp.115-301
- V* Christina Rossetti, *Verses* (1893), in *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition Volume II*, ed. R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp.179-335
- WH* Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* [1847], ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 1995)

## Preface

This thesis explores the poetry of Emily Brontë and Christina Rossetti in terms of the religious environments in which they lived. While Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal study of the nineteenth-century woman writer opened new lines of inquiry into women's writing of this period, it deemed Christianity an institution designed to arrest women's imaginative production.<sup>1</sup> The burst of criticism on nineteenth-century women writers that ensued thus relegated religion as inherent to Victorian patriarchy: repressive and confining.<sup>2</sup> Where the implications of religion in relation to nineteenth-century literature were considered by critics, their subjects remained primarily male.<sup>3</sup> New developments in the study of nineteenth-century doubt, science and spiritualism has shifted criticism's focus away from religious topics, perceived as conservative and traditional.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, however, critics have returned to the question of religion and faith, especially in terms of nineteenth-century women's writing. Isobel Armstrong, Elisabeth Jay and Michael Wheeler offer complex theological readings of nineteenth-century

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p.83.

<sup>2</sup> Many critics have little time for religion, even though the subjects of their work would have been absorbed within its discourse; see, for example, Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Elsie B. Michie, *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference and the Victorian Woman Writer* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993); Dale Spender, ed., *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Tradition* (London: The Women's Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Donald Davie, *A Gathered Church: The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest 1770-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); John Maynard, *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Robert M. Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature 1789-1824* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), who devote comparatively little time to women's writing.

<sup>4</sup> Notably, Blackwell's recent Victorian study companion devotes remarkably little space to religious issues, including only one chapter on Victorian definitions of the clergy by Christine L. Krueger, 'Clerical,' in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp.141-154; see also Gillian Beer, *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Lance St. John Butler, *Victorian Doubt: Literary and Cultural Discourses* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990); Bernard Lightman, ed., *Victorian Science in Context* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Frank Miller Turner, *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974); Robert Lee Wolff, *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England*



writing by women and men; and collections edited by Julie Melnyk, Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock directly address the subjects of gender, belief and religion.<sup>5</sup> Emily Brontë and Christina Rossetti are included in several recent studies examining the intersections between religion and literature. Marianne Thormählen and Stevie Davies recognize the centrality of Methodism to Brontë's work; and Diane D'Amico, Antony Harrison and David A. Kent demonstrate that Rossetti was more than a pious and submissive believer.<sup>6</sup>

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(London: J. Murray, 1977); Carla Yanni, *Nature's Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (London: Athlone, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993); Elisabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) and *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), for an abridged version, see *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Julie Melnyk, ed., *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of their Fathers* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998); Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock, ed., *Women of Faith and Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House* (London: Macmillan, 1998); see also Dale A. Johnson, *Women in English Religion 1700-1925* (New York and Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983); Christine L. Krueger, *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë: The Artist as Free Woman* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1983), *Emily Brontë, Key Women Writers* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (London: The Women's Press, 1994), *Emily Brontë, Writers and their Work* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998); Diane D'Amico, 'Christina Rossetti's *Christian Year*: Comfort for "the weary heart,"' *The Victorian Newsletter*, Fall (1987), 36-42; 'Christina Rossetti and *The English Woman's Journal*,' *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 3:1 (1994), 20-23; *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender and Time* (Louisiana: Louisiana University Press, 1999); 'Christina Rossetti's "Helpmeet,"' *Victorian Newsletter*, Spring (1994), 25-29; 'Christina Rossetti's *Later Life*: The Neglected Sonnet Sequence,' *Victorians Institute Journal*, 9 (1980-81), 21-28; 'Christina Rossetti: The Maturin Poems,' *Victorian Poetry*, 19:2 (1981), 117-137; 'Christina Rossetti's *Maude*: A Reconsideration,' *The University of Dayton Review*, 15:1 (1981), 129-142; "'Equal Before God": Christina Rossetti and the Fallen Women of Highgate Penitentiary,' *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, ed. Antony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), pp.67-83; 'Eve, Mary, and Mary Magdalene: Christina Rossetti's Feminine Triptych,' in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp.175-191; 'Fair Margaret of "Maiden-Song": Rossetti's Response to the Romantic Nightingale,' *The Victorian Newsletter*, 80 (1991), 8-13; *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender and Time* (Louisiana: Louisiana University Press, 1999); 'Reading and Rereading George Herbert and Christina Rossetti,' *John Donne Journal*, 4:2 (1985), 269-289; Antony H. Harrison, 'Christina Rossetti and the Sage Discourse of Feminist High Anglicanism,' *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, ed. Thais E. Morgan (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp.87-104; *Christina Rossetti in Context* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1988); with Beverly Taylor, ed., *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992); 'Epistolary Relations: The Correspondence of Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti,' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 4 (1995), 91-101; 'In the Shadow of E. B. B.: Christina Rossetti and Ideological

Nineteenth-century women's writing, then, has been granted a nuanced and profound status by current criticism, which, in engaging with religion as an oppressive institution or vibrant belief-system, conveys that the woman writer was perhaps not simply imprisoned within religious orthodoxy. Such criticism implies that women embraced religion independently of tyrannical fathers and husbands, not as victims of a false consciousness, but as thinking individuals concerned with issues like Christian doctrine and the role of the Church that were of wide concern in Victorian society. Despite the value of such work, its focus on women's Christian sentiment, piety and devotion leaves little time to acknowledge those who evolved an intellectual relationship with religion. This relationship, grounded as it was on a scholarly understanding of religious tract and sermons, was marked either by an oppositional desire to deconstruct religion's foundations, or by the promotion of specific Christian doctrines by a defender of faith. Many studies refuse the evidence which suggests that some highly educated women did analyse the subject of religion in a deep theological or philosophical frame in both poetry and prose, and prefer to emphasize women's mystical association with God, or their charitable role within the Church.

It is my argument that many nineteenth-century women brought up Christian, whether or not they lapsed in later life, participated in religious discourse as scholars, reading sermons, critiquing doctrines and concerned with the ecclesiological and ecclesiastical developments that took place in the nineteenth century. Such a proposition intimates: first, that nineteenth-century women's writing was not always hampered by Christianity; second, that religion provided a field in which women could freely read and

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Estrangement,' in *Victorian Poets and Romantic Poems: Intertextuality and Ideology*, ed. Antony H. Harrison (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1990); ed., *The Letters of Christina Rossetti*, 4 vols (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1997-); *Victorian Poets and the Politics of Culture: Discourse and Ideology* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1998); *Victorian Poets and Romantic Poems: Intertextuality and Ideology* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1990); David A. Kent, ed., *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); "'By thought, word, and deed": George Herbert and Christina Rossetti,' in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp.250-273; 'Christina Rossetti's Dying,' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 5 (1996), 83-97; with P. G. Stanwood, *Selected Prose of Christina Rossetti* (London: Macmillan, 1998); 'Sequence and Meaning in Christina Rossetti's *Verses* (1893),' *Victorian Poetry*, 17:3 (1979), 259-26.

research; and third, that religion granted women an intellectual status they had been, with few exceptions, previously refused. My thesis uses Brontë and Rossetti as examples of this argument, the former struggling away from her religious background, and the latter voluntarily immersed within her faith. I contend here that Brontë and Rossetti experienced religion as intellectuals: Brontë a cultural commentator upon a Methodist belief-system she found passionate but repressive; Rossetti forging an intellectual identity as a late member of the High Church Oxford Movement.<sup>7</sup> Both evince their intellectualism, I suggest, by highlighting the very idea of serious thought and contemplation in their writing, marked as it is by a kind of ‘poetic gravity’ as my title implies.

While Brontë remained locked within Methodist ideology, I argue that she nevertheless questioned it by attempting to manipulate its characteristic expression of intense feeling within her poetry and *Wuthering Heights*. Rossetti responded to the Oxford Movement like a theologian, I contend, employing Tractarian poetics in her devotional verse and adhering to its doctrines as outlined by John Henry Newman, Edward Bouverie Pusey, Isaac Williams and others. The two poets are connected, however, because each write about religion to signal their intellectual ability. They appear here as ‘religious intellectuals,’ then, because the scholarly expression their writing contains is reliant on, and grounded in their intricate discussion and interpretation of religious doctrine, discourse and culture. It is worth mentioning here that this thesis is not a general evaluation of nineteenth-century women thinkers and their reaction to religion. The thesis is rather a discussion of Brontë and Rossetti as ‘religious intellectuals,’ examples, perhaps, of a wider phenomena beyond the scope of this project.

I have organized my discussion as follows. Chapter one, ‘The Religious Intellectual: An Introduction,’ outlines my argument that Brontë and Rossetti wrote

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<sup>7</sup> It is of note that women are often pivotal within the formation of new religious belief-systems, accepted as equals by their male counterparts like Rossetti. Only when such belief-systems become more established and less counter-cultural are women like Brontë marginalized.



about religion in an intellectual manner, and is divided into three parts. Part I fashions the two poets as ‘religious intellectuals,’ a term I define with reference to both nineteenth-century and current conceptions of the intellectual. Part II focuses upon Emily Brontë, wherein I argue that her construction as a mystic or Romantic poet by criticism serves to undermine her historical location in Methodist Yorkshire. Part III turns to Christina Rossetti, a writer regarded as intensely devotional by her critics, but in terms that do not locate her writing within nineteenth-century religious debate. I suggest here that both women engage with their religious cultures on an intellectual level, Brontë as a cultural commentator and Rossetti as a kind of female ‘theologian.’ The following chapters serve to detail such an argument, pinpointing those religious issues with which the two women were specifically concerned, and illustrating the contemplative manner in which they approached such issues.

Chapter two, ‘Brontë’s Response to Methodism and Religious Enthusiasm,’ both situates Emily Brontë within the Methodist environment in which she lived, and confirms her interest in the subject of religious enthusiasm. This chapter stands as a companion piece to chapter three, outlining the manner in which Brontë encountered enthusiasm. Part I, ‘Methodism,’ explores the Methodist background in which Brontë was entangled, discussing the figures of John Wesley and William Grimshaw as fundamental influences upon the poet. Part II, ‘Enthusiasm,’ argues that, while Brontë was repelled by religious orthodoxy, finding it tyrannical and oppressive, she was caught by religious enthusiasm as a vibrant, uplifting and so potentially liberating sensation. Enthusiasm did not free her from such orthodoxy, however, as I illustrate through readings of her poetry in chapter three. Her conception of the subject, however, through its signification within contemporary hymns, poetics, sermons and clinical conceptions of madness, all discussed within this chapter, demonstrates her intellectual grasp of the phenomenon of enthusiasm. Employing enthusiasm as a marker of intense passion, Brontë cannot escape the religious context in which she primarily discovered it, however, and thus remains imprisoned by the ideology she attempted to break from.



Chapter three, 'The Enthusiastic Sublime and Brontë's Prison Poems,' extends this argument by suggesting that Brontë communicated such entrapment to her reader through the image of the prison, a representation of religion itself. Brontë first locates her narrators within a prison space, which renders them locked within religious ideology. While the narrator is bound by chains and dungeon walls, she attempts to release herself from such confinement through her imagination. The feeling of transcendence she aims at mirrors the sublime, I suggest, but, framed within religion, enacts an enthusiastic experience. I call this Brontë's enthusiastic sublime. Part I, 'Romantic Prisons and Brontë's Sublime,' locates Brontë's verse within a tradition of Romantic prison poetry evocative of a sublime, enthusiastic in nature and informed by John Dennis and Edmund Burke. Part II, 'Religion as Prison,' closely explores Brontë's poetry as it renders Christianity oppressive and inescapable, an argument conveyed through three themes: the sublime, prisons and liberty. The enthusiastic sublime promises liberty to Brontë's narrator, but, marked by enthusiasm and thus Christianity, confines her further within religion. Thus Brontë commented upon religion's oppressive nature from within, struggling to release herself from religion, but defeated by its dominance over society.

Chapter four, 'Rossetti's Ritualist Poetics,' turns to Christina Rossetti's traditional interest in Tractarianism, exploring her use of its ritual in her poetry. The chapter is divided into three parts. Part I, 'The Oxford Movement: An Intellectual Faith,' examines the Oxford Movement as a belief-system which encouraged scholarly activity in women, as well as men. I thus analyse Richard Frederick Littledale's *The Religious Education of Women* (1873), a Tractarian pamphlet in support of women's intellectual orientation. Part II, 'Ritualism,' discusses the details of the ritual ceremony as it was enacted within Tractarian churches. I argue here that Rossetti's adolescent 'breakdown' may have been caused by her practice of an obsessive faith, fashioned after the Oxford Movement figure, Edward Bouverie Pusey, and informed by her fascination with ritual. Part III, 'A Ritual Poetics,' turns to Rossetti's poetical employment of

imagery connoting ritual, and looks specifically at ritualistic themes predominant in her writing: crucifixes, sainthood and prayers for the dead. Such ritual adorns her poetry as it embellishes Tractarian churches, and thus enabled the reader to intensify apparently simple verses with theological references to ceremonial practice. It is also suggested that the ritual atmosphere Rossetti's verse evokes fashions a silent study space in which the believer might think about religion and God.

Chapter five, 'Reserving Faith in Rossetti's Devotional Poetry,' focuses upon her presentation of this ritualistic faith to God. I forward the idea that she adhered to the doctrine of reserve, a concept that proposed the holding back of God's counsel from those who were unprepared both spiritually and intellectually, and thus unworthy. Part I, 'Reserve: Doctrine and Poetics,' investigates, first, the idea of reserve as presented by Isaac Williams within the multi-authored ninety-part *Tracts for the Times* (1833-1841) which served to outline Oxford Movement theology; and second, the place of reserve within Tractarian poetics as clarified by John Keble and Newman and practiced by Rossetti. Part II, 'Rossetti Reads Reserve,' explores Rossetti's employment of reserve within her poetry, a genre she considered ideal through which to commune with God. Reserve is predominantly figured in Rossetti's poetry in two ways: first, through the image of the chancel screen, which served to metaphorically conceal God from the believer; and second, through images of whiteness and winter, spiritually and physically purifying the believer, while bleaching away and so reserving her presence before God.

I supply evidence for these arguments chiefly through the poetry of these two writers, illuminating their verse with reference to their prose. Brontë's poetry is examined as it appears in Derek Roper and Edward Chitham's edition, selected here because of its chronological arrangement of the poetry and retention of the poet's original spelling.<sup>8</sup> Post-dating the poetry, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) served to repeat, in a sometimes clarified form, many of the religious issues Brontë engaged with, and thus I turn to those parts of the novel which directly comment upon Methodism. Rebecca

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<sup>8</sup> Derek Roper and Edward Chitham, ed., *The Poems of Emily Brontë* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

Crump's edition of Rossetti's verse remains the most complete collection available, and I therefore use it as a reference text.<sup>9</sup> I concentrate predominantly on Rossetti's late compilation of devotional poetry, *Verses* (1893), but make specific reference to earlier texts, notably *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) and *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881) as they highlight the poet's theological concerns. Her devotional prose echoes many of the religious ideas expressed in *Verses*, and I use nineteenth-century editions of Rossetti's *Annus Domini* (1874), *Seek and Find* (1879), *Called To Be Saints* (1881), *Letter and Spirit* (1883), *Time Flies* (1885) and *The Face of the Deep* (1892) to gloss her poetry.

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<sup>9</sup> R. W. Crump, ed., *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition*, 3 vols (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979-1990).

## Religious Intellectuals: An Introduction

This chapter outlines my argument that Brontë and Rossetti forged an intellectual identity by writing about religion. I contend that it is useful for the reader to acknowledge their references to both religious culture and theological doctrine in their poetry and prose, thus situating the two women as astute commentators upon society. Engaged with religion in a time when Christianity was in crisis, Brontë and Rossetti's writing reflects a general preoccupation with religious issues. Like Matthew Arnold and Gerard Manley Hopkins, Brontë and Rossetti struggled with religious ideas that were increasingly under attack by scientific and historical developments. Unable to claim the professional public identity Arnold and Hopkins enjoyed, Brontë and Rossetti assumed an intellectual role free from the pretensions inherent in the concept of 'the man of letters.' Both poets, the first driven by a political desire to dismantle Christian ideology, the latter concerned to prove the intensity of her faith, followed an intellectual trajectory particular to women thinkers. This trajectory allows them to question, subvert and refigure those religious values by which both poets were embraced.

The thesis overall aims to address the poets' roles as observers of religious issues by labelling them 'religious intellectuals.' Chapter one, then, examines precisely what I mean by this term with reference to both nineteenth-century and current conceptions of the intellectual. Part I, 'The Religious Intellectual,' outlines my definition of this phrase with regard to both nineteenth-century notions of the intellectual as conceived by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Stuart Mill; and current formations of the intellectual suggested by Gertrude Himmelfarb, T. W. Heyck, Stefan Collini, Edward Said and Antonio Gramsci. Part II, 'Emily Brontë,' suggests that criticism's consideration of Brontë as either a mystic or Romantic ignores the poet's location in a specifically



Methodist environment, and thus her intellectual reception of such an environment. Part III, 'Christina Rossetti,' contemplates Rossetti's role as a devotional writer, consistently regarded as Christian, but frequently denied the status of 'intellectual.' I investigate first, however, why so many religious nineteenth-century women are refused the status of 'intellectual' in the first place, and clarify why the thesis focuses upon Brontë and Rossetti specifically as 'religious intellectuals.'

Many of the most prominent intellectuals within the nineteenth century are 'religious,' from Coleridge to the later Wordsworth, John Keble to John Henry Newman, Tennyson to Hopkins.<sup>1</sup> Why, then, are scholarly religious women refused the status of intellectual within the nineteenth century by current criticism, both literary and historical? The assumed subservient and humble nature of such women has granted them a dilettante status for many, a fate that has befallen anonymous female hymn writers and, until recent feminist work, even better known figures such as Hannah More, Anne Brontë, Felicia Skene, Adelaide Anne Procter and Charlotte M. Yonge. It is as if critics are prepared to rescue male religious thinkers from Marx's imputation of religion as

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<sup>1</sup> The theological dimension of western intellectual writing within the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is striking. Religious thought preoccupied thinkers both believing and secular, and Britain remained overwhelmingly Christian until the end of Victoria's reign and beyond. The dependence of intellectual thought upon religion from traditional Judaism onwards is illuminated in writings such as those of the Church Fathers, Christian humanists and Reformation scholars; see Arthur Trace, *Christianity and the Intellectuals* (La Salle, Illinois: Sherwood Sugden and Company, 1983). Religious subjects dominated printed matter, while popular affairs were communicated to the majority in the form of non-homiletic sermons delivered in Church, and thus framed within Anglican rite; see James Downey, *The Eighteenth-Century Pulpit: A Study in the Sermons of Butler, Berkeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitefield and Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp.2-3. The intellectual elite debated religion in the context of reverent works by John Locke and Samuel Clarke, as well as texts that questioned Christianity by David Hume and Voltaire. While zealous George Whitefield condemned such secular scholarship, John Wesley valued intellectual training; see *Eighteenth-Century Pulpit*, p.197. For Wesley, God's message is elevated by simplified classical, literary and theological references, countless in his own sermons, in Downey, *Eighteenth-Century Pulpit*, p.218. For the High element of the Anglican Church, however, Wesley had cheapened theological knowledge by throwing intellectual pearls to ignorant swine. Coleridge proposed the formation of an intellectual clerisy to guide the religious education of the masses, see Ben Knights, *The Idea of the Clerisy in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). The mid-nineteenth-century Oxford Movement, too, determined to reserve religion for those worthy believers who understood theological debate and doctrine, producing a number of Tracts to guide the reader. At the same time, the Victorian march of the mind encouraged those scientific pursuits which were to, on one level, carry through Britain's secularization, and on another, reshape faith into an instinctive and personal belief system outside of the Church.

unenlightened and anti-progressive, but not women.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, those nineteenth-century women who are commonly regarded as intellectual are often emphatically non-Christian. Deirdre David's *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy* discusses three women of whom two, Harriet Martineau and George Eliot, are specifically commended for their critical stance against Christianity.<sup>3</sup> The third, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, is forgiven her religious sympathies in light of *Aurora Leigh*'s dismantling of Christian socialism, the Church of England, and aspects of Roman Catholicism. Since Cora Kaplan's introduction to *Aurora Leigh*, critics have constructed Barrett Browning's intellectual identity as predominantly political, a poet concerned with material conditions rather than transcendental ones.<sup>4</sup>

More angrily and violently opposed to orthodox religion than the above, argue some critics, is Emily Brontë: heretic soul. Prince D. S. Mirsky declares of Brontë: 'Profoundly and essentially unchristian is all her attitude to Life, for she is a stranger to humility' and 'noble Christian weakness.'<sup>5</sup> More recently, Stevie Davies has remarked: 'Emily Brontë's reaction to Christianity' was 'in essence retaliatory.'<sup>6</sup> Brontë's alleged aversion to the Church is understood as being fuelled by an intellectual disposition noted primarily by her tutor, Constantin Héger, who championed her genius while she studied with him in Brussels.<sup>7</sup> The poet is only stripped of her intellectual status when constructed as a Christian mystic, as I argue below. Intellectual because she is not

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<sup>2</sup> Robert M. Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature 1789-1824* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.2.

<sup>3</sup> Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Cora Kaplan, 'Introduction' [1977], in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* (London: The Women's Press, 1978), pp.5-36 (p.6).

<sup>5</sup> Prince D. S. Mirsky, 'Emily Brontë,' *The London Mercury*, 7:39 (1923), pp.266-72, in *The Brontë Sisters: Critical Assessments I: Recollections, Obituaries, Early Studies 1848-1943; Evaluations of Juvenilia and Poems, Writers on the Writing*, ed. Eleanor McNeess (Sussex: Helm Information, 1996), pp. 360-367 (p.361).

<sup>6</sup> Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (London: The Women's Press, 1994), p.140; Arthur Pollard also notes that not 'much profit can be derived from an attempt to apply Christian concepts and categories to *Wuthering Heights*,' but does not discuss the poetry, in 'The Brontës and their Father's Faith,' *Essays and Studies*, 37 (1984), 46-61 (p.55).

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* [1857], ed. Elisabeth Jay (London: Penguin, 1997), p.166; see also Sue Lonoff, 'Introduction,' *The Belgian Essays: Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë: A*

Christian, then, Emily Brontë contrasts fiercely with the devotional Christina Rossetti, excluded from David's monograph, she argues, because her intellectual status is not 'abundantly suggestive.'<sup>8</sup> Rossetti cannot be an intellectual because of her faith, it seems, David's Victorian intellectual being an unbelieving 'efficient auxiliary assistant' to a middle class troubled by secularization.<sup>9</sup> For many readers, Rossetti is either a rhyming 'saint' or a poet of 'pretty trifle[s],' views which divest her of scholarly insight into her subject matter.<sup>10</sup> Apparently antithetic figures, one sternly philosophical, the other gushing and holy, Brontë and Rossetti structure my discussion of women, religion and intellectualism. Using these two poets as examples, I suggest that nineteenth-century women were sometimes intellectual *because* of their interest in religion. Religion, then, both enabled and styled their thinking, which was neither merely pious nor merely rebellious. Less concerned than men like Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill with the status of religion in an increasingly secular culture, these women concentrated on religion in relation to issues that concerned their own empowerment as thinking writers.

The nineteenth century proved a tremendous forum in which to discuss and interpret doctrine, Church affiliation and theological philosophy.<sup>11</sup> Women had no institutional power within the Church, but religion was, as Julie Melnyk argues, 'one of the few socially acceptable areas of interest' for them.<sup>12</sup> As a result, women wrote about religion in published and unpublished contexts alike. It may be that modernism's investment in reading the Victorians as engineers of secularism is underpinned by a

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*Critical Edition*, ed. Sue Lonoff (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp.xxi-lxxvi (p.xxxii).

<sup>8</sup> David, *Intellectual Women*, p.ix.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p.12.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Cropper recites how, when Alice Meynell heard that Katharine Tynan Higson was to visit Rossetti, she informed her that: 'You are going to have the privilege of seeing a saint,' in *Shining Lights: Six Anglican Saints of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963), p.97; Stuart Curran writes that Rossetti is 'full of self-pity and sentimentality,' refusing to 'aim beyond a pretty trifle,' in 'The Lyric Voice of Christina Rossetti,' *Victorian Poetry*, 9 (1971), 287-299 (pp.287, 289).

<sup>11</sup> Interest in matters religious were at their peak in the nineteenth century, and as Barbara Dennis argues, the age 'was more interested in theological questions and problems, than any time previous or to come,' in Barbara Dennis, 'Introduction,' in *Reform and Intellectual Debate in Victorian England*, ed. David Skilton and Barbara Dennis (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp.1-19 (p.5).



desire to remove religion as an arena of thought within which women especially excelled. T. S. Eliot, for example, compared George Herbert with Christina Rossetti to find the latter wanting in scholarly power. Herbert's poetry, Eliot insisted, displays the 'brain work' of a 'trained theologian,' where Rossetti's 'religious verse suffers' due to her 'inferior intellectual gift.'<sup>13</sup> Eliot reveals more than his dislike for Rossetti here, betraying his acceptance of the Victorian dualism between religion and theology. Christianity and religion were deemed feminine and sentimental, to be distinguished from the scientific, philosophical and masculine discourse of theology. John Ruskin's nervous warning in 'Of Queens' Gardens' (1865) that: 'There *is* one dangerous science for women [ . . . ] that of theology' reveals, however, that women were engaged with theological ideas.<sup>14</sup> Ruskin was thus instructing women, not away from their Christian faith, but from the scholarly pursuit of God.

In other contexts, however, religious men welcomed their female counterparts as fellow intellectuals. Wesley firmly declared that women, 'as well as men, are rational creatures.'<sup>15</sup> The Tractarian Richard Frederick Littledale deemed educated women 'the intellectual rivals of men' in a pamphlet devoted to the subject.<sup>16</sup> Women poets were granted an especially high status as intellectuals. Littledale, for example, along with Swinburne and Ruskin himself, acclaimed Barrett Browning as 'one of the most gifted women our time or any time has seen,' and developed a scholarly relationship with

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<sup>12</sup> Julie Melnyk, 'Introduction,' in *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of their Fathers*, ed. Julie Melnyk (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998), pp.xi-xviii (p.xi).

<sup>13</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'George Herbert,' *Spectator*, 148 (1932), in Diane D'Amico, 'Reading and Rereading George Herbert and Christina Rossetti,' *John Donne Journal*, 4:2 (1985), 269-289 (p.270); on Rossetti's relation to Herbert, see also David A. Kent, "'By thought, word, and deed": George Herbert and Christina Rossetti,' in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp.250-273.

<sup>14</sup> John Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens' [1865], in *Sesame and Lilies, Unto This Last and The Political Economy of Art* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1907), p.78.

<sup>15</sup> John Wesley, 'Sermon 98: On Visiting the Sick' [1786], *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons III: 71-114*, ed. Albert C. Outler, 26 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), III, pp.384-397 (p.396).

<sup>16</sup> Richard Frederick Littledale, *The Religious Education of Women* (London: Henry S. King and Co., 1873), pp.3-4; the pamphlet was first published in the *Contemporary Review*, 20 (1872), 1-26.



Rossetti as I discuss below.<sup>17</sup> Religious education was thought essential for every girl, as women such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More claimed in tune with the founder of Sunday Schools, Robert Raikes.

Pamphleteers too heralded the intellect of women, accenting the importance of education in achieving equality between men and women of the same social class.<sup>18</sup>

Mary Robinson's *Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799) declared that women were 'equal' to men 'in activity of the mind,' and in some cases, 'corporeal strength' too, envisioning a 'UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN; where they should be politely, and at the same time classically educated.'<sup>19</sup> Emily Shirreff, founder of Hitchin (Girton) College, outlined an intensive course of study in classics and philosophy, science and mathematics, history and literature in *Intellectual Education and its Influence on the Character and Happiness of Women* (1859) for the young woman denied entrance to the kind of higher education Robinson

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<sup>17</sup> Littledale, *Religious Education*, p.49; he quotes from Barrett Browning's 'A Drama in Exile' to prove his point, although does not cite the poet or the poem to which he refers; nineteenth-century women poets have been widely recognized as part of their own specific tradition in recent years; see, for example, Isobel Armstrong, ed., *Women's Poetry: Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre 1830-1900* (London: Macmillan, 1999), ed., *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon 1730-1820* (London: Macmillan, 1998), with Joseph Bristow and Cath Sharrock, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), "'A Music of Thine Own": Women's Poetry – an Expressive Tradition?' in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.318- 377; Andrew Ashfield, *Romantic Women Poets 1770-1838: An Anthology Volume I* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) and *Romantic Women Poets 1788-1848: An Anthology Volume II* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Jennifer Breen, *Victorian Women Poets 1830-1901: An Anthology* (London: Everyman, 1994); Joseph Bristow, *Victorian Women Poets: Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning and Christina Rossetti* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Tess Cosslett, ed., *Victorian Women Poets* (London and New York: Longman, 1996); Paula Feldman, *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era: An Anthology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997); Antony Harrison, *Victorian Poets and Romantic Poems: Intertextuality and Ideology* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1990); Kathleen Hickok, *Representations of Women: Nineteenth-Century British Women's Poetry* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1984); Harriet Devine Jump, *Women's Writing of the Romantic Period 1789-1836* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); Theresa M. Kelley and Paula R. Feldman, *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Counter-voices* (London: University Press of New England, 1995); Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (New York and London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1992), and ed., *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), with Margaret Reynolds, *Victorian Woman Poets: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Duncan Wu, ed., *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Besides the polemic I note here, there was a general surge of interest in women's education, girl's schools and the opening of universities for women, a subject beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Robinson, *Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination 1799*, intro. Jonathan Wordsworth (Poole: Woodstock Books, 1998), pp.17, 92.

anticipated.<sup>20</sup> Isaac Reeve maintained in *The Intellect of Woman: Not Naturally Inferior to that of Man and the Consequent Importance of its Being Developed by a More Solid Course of Education* (1859) that ‘woman stands, in an intellectual point of view, on a perfect level with man’ and has been ‘misdirected’ to ‘cultivate personal graces and light accomplishments, to the neglect of her nobler faculties.’<sup>21</sup>

The support Robinson, Shirreff and Reeve gave to women’s intellectual status counters studies undertaken by twentieth-century critics which tend to avoid nineteenth-century women’s thought. Gertrude Himmelfarb’s *Victorian Minds: A Study of Intellectuals in Crisis and Ideologies in Transition* all but disregards thinking women, devoting time only to George Eliot.<sup>22</sup> T.W. Heyck’s lack of reference to women intellectuals in *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* is especially notable within his chapter on cultural criticism and literary life.<sup>23</sup> Stefan Collini excludes women from his list of intellectual figures in *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930*, ‘apart from passing mention of exceptional individuals like George Eliot or Mrs Humphrey Ward.’<sup>24</sup> The ‘use of a male pseudonym by one of these writers and the “correct” married form by the other’ is reason enough for such omissions, argues the author. Manly, stoic, frank and vigorous, Collini’s ‘conventionally educated’ Victorian intellectual sits in his club reading the pages of a ‘servant-ironed’ newspaper, a transparently gendered definition.<sup>25</sup> While the class connotations of such an image are unacceptable to current criticism, the gender implications, one might suggest, are not. Elaine Showalter has observed the problems for ‘women thinkers, speakers and writers’ working within an academic environment

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<sup>20</sup> Emily Shirreff, *Intellectual Education and Its Influence on the Character and Happiness of Women* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1858).

<sup>21</sup> Isaac Reeve, *The Intellect of Woman: Not Naturally Inferior to that of Man and the Consequent Importance of its Being Developed by a More Solid Course of Education* (London: Piper, Stephenson and Spence, 1859), p.iii.

<sup>22</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Victorian Minds: A Study of Intellectuals in Crisis and Ideologies in Transition* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1952; repr.1995).

<sup>23</sup> T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp.190-220.

<sup>24</sup> Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.3.

founded upon masculinized notions of intellectualism, such as that forwarded by Collini.<sup>26</sup> She notes Harold Bloom's description of the critic as a 'strong reader,' aggressively taking on literature as an 'academic macho sport' in an attempt to defeminize literary studies.<sup>27</sup> For Showalter, the feminist critic achieves her authority 'through both the demonstration of mastery and the admission of uncertainty,' willing to expose gaps in knowledge without appearing compromised.<sup>28</sup>

Nineteenth-century women intellectuals, Showalter suggests with reference to Margaret Fuller and Florence Nightingale, had to compromise when expressing intellectual ideas for fear of being branded either egotistical or hysterical. The woman whose intellectual activity centred around God, however, was excused and often praised for her academic pursuits within the nineteenth century. I argue here that by mastering the discourse of theology, nineteenth-century women secured their position as intellectuals in a manner critics from the modernists onwards were to reject. Male intellectuals and theologians were legitimate because they provided critics with a heritage of scholarly champions, courageous and upright models for future thought. Alternately, women threatened to unbalance such a genealogy by feminizing theology and thus other academic arenas, the very 'crisis' Bloom addresses. For the Victorians, however, religious male intellectuals had already feminized theology with their effeminate Christian benevolence.<sup>29</sup> Those middle-class women who had access to both their Church and libraries might undertake a course of scholarly theological study, unquestioned and unharried. Both Brontë and Rossetti had such a privilege of access,

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<sup>25</sup> Collini, *Public Moralists*, pp.171ff.

<sup>26</sup> Elaine Showalter, 'Miranda and Cassandra: The Discourse of the Feminist Intellectual,' in *Traditions and the Talents of Women*, ed. Florence Howe (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp.311-327.

<sup>27</sup> Showalter, 'Miranda and Cassandra,' pp.322-323.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, pp.324-325.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, David Hilliard, 'UnEnglish and UnManly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality,' *Victorian Studies*, 25:2 (1982), 181-210; and John Shelton Reed, "'Giddy Young Men": A Counter-Cultural Aspect of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism,' *Comparative Social Research*, 11 (1989), 209-226; notably, William Bell Scott, whom L. M. Packer notoriously and inaccurately deemed Rossetti's lover, too disparaged Tractarianism as a delicate and feminine movement, arguing that it 'distracted weak intellects,' in Kathleen Jones, *Learning not to be First: The Life of Christina Rossetti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.57.



although they made very different uses of it, as I will discuss. By studying theological literature and then interpreting it within their writing, these two poets earn a standing I call here that of the 'religious intellectual.'

## I The 'Religious Intellectual'

What is a religious intellectual, however? Does the meaning of such a phrase differ from that of theologian, for example? The religious intellectual, I argue, executes the same explorations as the theologian, contemplating doctrine, scripture and the nature of God. 'Theologian,' however, is a professional title awarded by the University and the Church, realms to which women were peripheral.<sup>30</sup> The term religious intellectual, then, replaces the perhaps anachronistic idea of the female theologian, while forbearing from deeming intellectual religious women simply clever Christians. For Susan Phinney-Conrad, the intellectual is dissociated from institutional affiliations like the University and Church anyway, more concerned to master, analyse, interpret and revise 'a portion of their culture's extant body of knowledge.'<sup>31</sup> Phinney-Conrad's accent on the word culture in her discussion of the intellectual provides another clue to my rendering of the religious intellectual. For while the theologian predominantly concerns himself with matters unworldly and spiritual, the religious intellectual attends to theological debate as it appears within its cultural context. Brontë writes of Yorkshire Methodism as it affects cultural phenomena such as the medical discourse of madness and philosophical concept of the sublime. Rossetti versifies upon the Catholic aspects of her Tractarian faith, concerned to recommend a reserved path to God that holds back sacred truths for the intellectually qualified Victorian Christian.

What makes such religious and cultural commentary specifically intellectual, though? Are all who write of religion in a scholarly manner in the nineteenth century to

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<sup>30</sup> See Melnyk, 'Introduction,' p.xii.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Phinney-Conrad, *Perish the Thought: Intellectual Women in Romantic America 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.6.

be credited as ‘religious intellectuals’? The ‘religious intellectual,’ I think, can be distinguished from other religious writers as one conscious of her status as an intellectual and who evinces this through highlighting the process of thought and contemplation in her writing. What, then, might we understand by the term ‘intellectual’ in the nineteenth century? For Heyck, it was the “‘men of letters,” “literary men” and “cultivators of science,”” that formed that social group closest to our understanding of the intellectual.<sup>32</sup> Heyck even suggests that the concept of the intellectual did not exist until the 1870s, produced from the ‘cultural fragmentation’ of ‘industrial and post-industrial societies.’<sup>33</sup> Peter Allen more specifically defines the nineteenth-century intellectual as one able to display both a ‘mental and cultural competence’ within society.<sup>34</sup> Mentally, the intellectual was highly educated and separated from ‘ordinary thinking (especially Christian faith),’ Allen writes.<sup>35</sup> Culturally, the intellectual was devoted to high culture and the arts ‘as an antidote to the increasing vulgarity of the age.’<sup>36</sup> At once moving away from theology as the seat of knowledge and towards a Comtean religion of humanity, the Victorian intellectual occupied a semi-religious vocation. Until the mid-nineteenth century at least, the intellectual’s work was stuck within the theological sphere as ‘an umbrella for all branches of knowledge.’<sup>37</sup> Indeed, until the 1850s, Heyck claims, the clergy still claimed almost sixty percent of Oxbridge graduates for their profession.<sup>38</sup>

The inability of intellectuals to remove themselves from the theological model was made more difficult by the prevalence of the idea of Coleridge’s ‘clerisy’ within the Victorian period. For Ben Knights, this notion emerged from a new-found focus upon thinking individuals resulting from their activities in, and expositions of the French

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<sup>32</sup> Heyck, *Transformation*, p.15.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, pp.13-15.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Allen, ‘The Meanings of “An Intellectual”: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century English Usage,’ *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 55 (1985-86), 342-358 (pp.342-343); Allen’s argument suggests that the twentieth-century struggle to define the concept ‘intellectual’ is rooted in the Victorian distinction between mental and cultural competence.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p.345.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, p.347.

<sup>37</sup> Heyck, *Transformation*, p.86.

Revolution.<sup>39</sup> Such ‘intellectuals’ were increasingly considered, like Allen’s cultural experts, as the defenders of society and morality: not so much imaginative speculators as facilitators of the national good. Coleridge outlined his idea of the clerisy in *On the Constitution of the Church and State According to the Idea of Each* (1830).<sup>40</sup> Here, the clerisy appeared as a body of priest-like teachers, officers of ‘human actions and aspirations’ intent on reinvesting the education system with spiritual values and morals.<sup>41</sup> Institutionally, Coleridge suggested, the clerisy should be located within a ‘National Church,’ a secularized but still monistic branch of the state and collective of theological thinkers from different religious backgrounds.<sup>42</sup> Mill suggested that such ideas had ‘rescued’ the Church of England by refashioning it as an intellectual establishment.<sup>43</sup> Coleridge’s efforts, Mill argued, did not serve to aid the ‘worship of God’ or the ‘performance of religious ceremonies,’ but enabled an ‘advancement of knowledge, and the civilization and cultivation of the community.’<sup>44</sup>

Christianity, a ‘blessed accident’ history cannot deny, Coleridge believed, remained pivotal within society as a kind of mentor Church to this National Church. It was, Coleridge explained, like an ‘olive tree’ which in its growth fertilizes the soil in which the vine, the National Church, grows, thus improving ‘the strength and flavour of the wines’ (*Constitution*, p.44). Christian values, then, enriched society even if society refused to accept such values as Christian. Neither were the clerisy the same as the clergy, although both signifiers denoted the ‘man of learning’ for Coleridge (p.35). ‘The

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, p.70.

<sup>39</sup> Knights, *Clerisy*, p.4.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State According to the Idea of Each* [1830], ed. John Barrell (London: J. M. Dent, 1972); references to this edition are given after quotations in the text, and where necessary, signified by the title *Constitution*.

<sup>41</sup> Knights, *Clerisy*, p.13.

<sup>42</sup> As Edmund Burke noted, the English ‘do not consider their church establishment as convenient, but as essential to their state [ . . . ] Church and State are ideas inseparable in their minds and scarcely is the one ever mentioned without mentioning the other,’ in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford, 9 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981-1989), VIII, pp.141, 149, in Ryan, *Romantic Reformation*, p.23.

<sup>43</sup> John Stuart Mill, ‘Coleridge’ [1840], in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill Volume X: Essays on Ethics, Religion and Society*, ed. J. M. Robson, 33 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp.117-163 (p.150).

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, p.147.



clerisy of the nation, or national church,' Coleridge wrote, 'comprehend[s] the learned of all denominations; - the sages and professors of the law and jurisprudence; of medicine and physiology; of music; of military and civil architecture; of the physical sciences [including] mathematics' (p.36). In short, all of the 'so called liberal arts and sciences' were included in Coleridge's clerical equation, and yet it was the 'Theological' thinker that remained 'at the head' of this intellectual community (p.36). Theology, Coleridge argued, was responsible not only for the 'interpretation of languages,' the 'conservation' of historical events and 'momentous epochs and revolutions' (p.36). It had also enabled the system of ethics, philosophy and 'discipline of ideas' now directive of man's civil and social rights (p.36). As Christianity was to the National Church, exemplary and confirmatory, so the theologian was to the intellectual clerk.

Privileged as the nation's thinking elite, the clerisy earnestly accomplished their role as guardians of society through the accomplishment of two objectives, Coleridge argued. First, the clerisy must 'civilize' the lower classes by providing them with a 'NATIONAL EDUCATION' system intricate enough to train individuals 'up to citizens of the country, free subjects of the realm' (*Constitution*, p.37). This educative procedure served to make the individual obliged to the state and the National Church, 'the body politic' (p.37). Secondly, the clerisy had to cultivate an intellectual higher class that would endorse their scholarly pursuits, while assisting with the education of the lower classes.<sup>45</sup> The Victorians, as we shall see in relation to Mill, were especially attracted to the clerisy's ostensible engagement with all levels of society as moral, as well as educative, priests.<sup>46</sup> While the clergy used the idea of the clerisy as a rationale for creating a Christian establishment, educationalists applied it to the University profession. So too did its elitist overtones prove influential in the formation of other

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<sup>45</sup> It was particularly consequential to Coleridge how the individual conceived of the body politic because of his belief that the idea creates reality. The idea, he claimed, produces the thing it considers as a subjective unit, as opposed to that which is 'contemplated objectively,' namely a conception or 'a LAW'; as human reality was also controlled by transcendent forces, the idea was also endowed with a divine spirit deeming it worthy of possession only by an intellectually and spiritually minded elite organized as the clerisy, in John Barrell, 'Introduction,' *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, pp.viii-xxxii (p.xvi). see also Knights, *Clerisy*, pp.54-55.

intellectual groups intent on combining cultural leadership with social commitment. Developments in the University, research libraries, archives, publishing houses and professional societies were all indebted to Coleridge's promotion of liberal education.<sup>47</sup>

Nineteenth-century intellectuals, then, were confronted with an increasingly expanding realm in which to be intellectual. For Himmelfarb, these newly learned subjects were granted such opportunities by class status rather than dedication, not intellectuals at all, but rather 'cultured gentlem[en] whose occupation happened to be writing.'<sup>48</sup> For Walter E. Houghton, such high reachers were more socially useful, guiding the public through 'a contemporary scene' shattered by the breakdown of the 'authority of the church and the aristocracy.'<sup>49</sup> They did not, he argues, become intellectuals until this status was shaped by their isolation away from the public sphere from the 1870s onwards.<sup>50</sup> Houghton and Himmelfarb's Victorian men of letters, then, are more like Collini's public moralists than Coleridge's clerisy, impelled to escort their age through hard times as dignified and deeply moral leaders. The authority Collini's intellectual exercised, for example, depended upon his 'public identity [as] a gentlemen,' achieved on an income of £250 a year, rather than his spiritual merits.<sup>51</sup> He was otherwise marked by the display of five characteristics: an antipathy towards selfishness; a sense of moral agency; a properly cultivated use of emotion; an acceptance of deep feelings as productive of 'socially desirable actions'; and an anxiety lest one's conduct might serve only oneself.<sup>52</sup> Hence the individual who lived like Christ came to be valued over the individual who believed in him. As Emily Shirreff advised, women and men alike

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<sup>46</sup> Heyck, *Transformation*, p.193.

<sup>47</sup> See Allen, 'The Meanings of "An Intellectual,"' p.354.

<sup>48</sup> Himmelfarb, *Victorian Minds*, p.202.

<sup>49</sup> Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), pp.xvi-xvii.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*, p.xvi.

<sup>51</sup> Collini, *Public Moralists*, p.35.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*, p.65.



should ‘first learn to live like Christians, before they are taught to dispute like theologians.’<sup>53</sup>

A prominent exponent of this new morality was Mill, noted for his commentary on utility and justice, *Utilitarianism* (1861). For Mill, the term utilitarianism signified a creed which ‘holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.’<sup>54</sup> The desire for such happiness, which for Mill denotes moral fulfilment, unites society even as ‘nineteen-twentieths of mankind’ involuntarily never achieve it (p.217). The utilitarian thus strives to enable the happiness of others: ‘to do as one would be done by, and to love one’s neighbour as oneself’ (p.218). For Mill, this dictum, ‘the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth,’ constituted, not Christianity, but ‘utilitarian morality’ (p.218). The religious inference of such morality dominates Mill’s essay, ‘The Utility of Religion,’ written between 1850 and 1858. Religion remains important as a tutor of morals, Mill claimed, ‘since almost all who are taught any morality whatever, have it taught to them *as* religion.’<sup>55</sup> Liberated from its Christian framework, religious values should be sustained within Victorian culture to teach ‘social morality,’ a task Coleridge’s clerisy were designed to fulfil (‘Utility,’ p.415). While the ‘intellectual grounds’ of religious belief are so fanciful that they must rely upon ‘moral bribery’ and the ‘subordination of the understanding,’ religion ‘as a mere persuasion [ . . . ] is really indispensable to the temporal welfare of mankind’ (pp.404-405). For if the individual ceases to believe in God, she might also lose those principles – ‘justice, veracity, beneficence’ – enforced by religious ideology (pp.403, 407).

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<sup>53</sup> Shirreff, *Intellectual Education*, p.196; Matthew Arnold’s sonnet ‘The Better Part’ [1867; 1868] too resolved the debate as to whether Christ was divine or historical by affirming the importance of being ‘such men as he!’ in *The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p.170 (l.14); see also Houghton, *Victorian Frame*, p.273.

<sup>54</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* [1861], in *Collected Works: X*, pp.203-259 (p.211); further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>55</sup> John Stuart Mill, ‘The Utility of Religion,’ in *Three Essays on Religion* [1874], Robson, *Collected Works: X*, pp.403-428 (p.407); further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and where necessary, signified by the title ‘Utility.’

Religion also feeds our 'desire to know,' Mill suggested, human existence 'girt round' with numerous mysteries only the imagination may attempt to penetrate ('Utility,' pp.418-419). Like poetry, religion supplies that 'part of the human constitution' that craves 'ideal conceptions grander and more beautiful than we see realized in the prose of human life' (p.419). The elevating capacity Mill assigned to religion and poetry here is the sublime, produced within the cultivated and 'lofty imagination,' if not the 'low and mean [ . . . ] grovelling one' which feels nothing at all (p.419). The religious sublime, a subject I take up in chapter three, notably materializes through poetry as that literary genre closest to God. John Dennis favoured poetry as 'more passionate and sensual than prose,' and so better able to express the fervent feelings of the believing individual.<sup>56</sup> John Keble believed poetry to be a channel linking the human to heaven, conveying 'thoughts and feelings beyond the power of prose to describe' and thus making sense of God's enigmatic and mysterious world.<sup>57</sup> For Mill, religion surpassed poetry, however, because it seemed to attach realities to these mysteries conveniently existing 'in some other world than ours' ('Utility,' p.419). The mind 'catches' at these mysterious 'rumours,' particularly when 'delivered by persons whom it deems wiser than itself,' a clergy-based authority upholding religious ideology (p.419). Mill accepted the 'essence of religion' as a 'strong and earnest direction of the emotions and desires' towards ideals and excellence (p.422). Yet he insisted that this condition would be fulfilled better by a 'Religion of Humanity,' that is a religion of morals separate from supernatural religion, especially Roman Catholicism (p.422). Supernatural religion insults the intellect with implausibilities as it manipulates public opinion with the fear of divine retribution. Moreover, it instructs believers to accept fixed doctrines which are unable to adjust to the changing historical moment (p.428). Alternatively, the religion of humanity fulfils the needs of humankind as they

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<sup>56</sup> John Dennis, 'The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry' [1701], in Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, *The Sublime: A Reader of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.32-34 (p.32).

<sup>57</sup> John Keble, *De Poetica Praelectiones academicae Oxonii habitae, annis MDCCCXXXII-MDCCCXLI* (London: J. H. Parker, 1844), in Chadwick, *Mind of the Oxford Movement*, p.70.

have been ‘historically developed,’ thus uniting society with a ‘deep feeling for the general good’ (p.422).

Both *Utilitarianism* and ‘The Utility of Religion’ promoted a social morality based in unselfish, honest feeling such as Collini’s manly intellectuals would have virtuously defended. Yet for Mill, as he argued in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), such men were morally inferior to the best of women, whose ‘minds are by nature more mobile than those of men [ . . . ] more fitted for dividing their faculties among many things than for travelling in any one path.’<sup>58</sup> This description of the female mind as adaptable to many disciplines rather than just one adheres to the intellectual spirit of Coleridge’s clerical scholar rather than Allen’s Victorian cultural expert. Like the theologian who refuses to understand God in conceptual terms, women, Mill stated with Harriet Taylor in mind, ‘seldom run[ ] wild after an abstraction’ and thus serve to make concrete the thoughts of ‘thinking men’ (p.275). Women have as much ‘strong feeling’ and ‘strong self-control’ for Mill as Collini’s manly men, qualities productive of more than Carlyle’s dogmatic ‘heroes of impulse’ (p.278). Force of character too allows for ‘self-conquest,’ in which one balances passionate feelings with a sense of duty towards the wider moral good (p.278). Excitable and emotional, but uninterested in abstraction, women adequately enact Mill’s social morality, one grounded on giving the ‘proper province’ to ‘duty on the one hand and to freedom and spontaneity on the other’ (‘Utility of Religion,’ p.421). Social progress and morality were dependent on universal suffrage, Mill maintained, and insurmountable without morally and intellectually liberating women as well as men.

Mill’s advancement of women’s claim to be regarded as intellectuals is implicit rather than explicit and relevant only to the educated middle classes. Similarly Mill assumes society’s unquestioning acceptance of an ethical system rooted in Christian values. Women’s equality with men, intellectually, politically and economically, is

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<sup>58</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Vindication of the Rights of Woman; and John Stuart Mill: The Subjection of Women*, ed. Mary Warnock (London: J. M. Dent, 1985), pp.217-317 (p.278); further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.



nevertheless inherent to his philosophy, rehearsed notably by Harriet Taylor, 'public moralist' in all but her gender. More important to Mill is that the thinking population, male and female, preach a religion of humanity and sustain social morality. The intellectual work Mill proposed his moral priests undertake is related, then, to what Edward Shils regards as the 'original' intellectual work, based in 'religious preoccupations.'<sup>59</sup> Shils' intellectuals thus engage in a search for truth, not always sacred, but marked by their religious heritage.

For Edward Said, however, this kind of intellectual remains always part of a 'sort of clerical minority,' educated to concern herself with 'metaphysical speculation' rather than 'the pursuit of practical aims.'<sup>60</sup> Said claims that the intellectual should instead be entirely removed from religious concerns, 'a secular being' free from devotion to any kind of belief-system, spiritual or political (*Representations*, p.89). Even professional and corporate affiliations warp the intellectual's ability to think, influenced as she is by 'the requirements and prerogatives of power, and towards being directly employed by it' (p.59). The intellectual is thus necessarily an amateur for Said, one who, he claims speaking as an academic, 'can enter and transform the merely professional routine most of us go through into something much more lively and radical' (pp.61-62). The ideal thinker in this context becomes the young Stephen Dedalus, who, for Said, feels 'that as an intellectual his duty was not to serve any power or authority at all' (p.61). Thinking becomes the very mode through which Dedalus experiences the world, a form of meditation which founds the modern 'intellectual vocation' (p.12). For Brontë and Rossetti, like the fictional Dedalus, thinking is a mode of experiencing their religious societies, though the first does so as a hostile observer, the second as a complicit believer. Brontë fits Said's description of the ideal intellectual even more than Dedalus, perhaps, an amateur whose world is made up entirely of her own thought, albeit formed

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<sup>59</sup> Edward Shils, *The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), p.16; see also Trace, *Christianity*, p.18; and Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Intellectual* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

<sup>60</sup> Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.4; further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

by the Methodist mentality within which her character was developed. Like Said's amateur intellectual, Brontë comments critically on what she sees as a repressive ideology, which, while defeating her on one level (imprisoning her within its value-system), is finally revealed as irrational and domineering to her readers.

Rossetti, in contrast, seems to fall outside of Said's definition of the intellectual, intensely devoted to a Christian authority and concerned to demonstrate and proselytize for her faith by poetically demonstrating her expertise in Tractarian doctrine and scripture. Assuming the role of theologian, Rossetti devotes herself to specializing in a 'narrow area of knowledge,' an exercise that for Said forces one to write 'only in terms of impersonal theories or methodologies' (*Representations*, p.57). To be an expert, Said argues, 'you have to be certified by the proper authorities; they instruct you in speaking the right language, citing the right authorities, holding down the right territory' (p.58). Rossetti's poetry was, in line with Said's argument, published by a Tractarian press and her poetic discourse was forged through biblical language and references to scripture, the Fathers of the Church and various writers of the *Tracts for the Times*, as I argue in chapters four and five. Yet in another way, Rossetti conforms with Said's definition of the intellectual in that she comments upon religious issues from a non-professional stance, somewhere 'between loneliness and alignment,' never a cleric, but granted a distinguished religious lay identity by her readers and critics (p.16). Struggling to articulate herself amidst 'a massed history of already articulated values and ideas,' predominantly 'male' and patriarchal, the female thinker, like the intellectual, remains always marginal and insubordinate to the ruling hegemony, whether religious or political (p.26).

The nineteenth-century intellectual woman, then, was simultaneously 'weighed down by her ancillary identity' to a male sphere, as David argues, and able to subvert it because of her gender.<sup>61</sup> David thus finds it useful to redact the intellectual woman through Antonio Gramsci's definition of two types of intellectuals in his *Prison*

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<sup>61</sup> David, *Intellectual Women*, p.5.

*Notebooks*, the one peripheral to ideology, and the other working within it. While Gramsci argued that ‘all men are intellectuals,’ he suggested that only organic and traditional thinkers ‘have in society the function of intellectuals.’<sup>62</sup> Gramsci’s organic intellectual is a thinking citizen of a particular social class whose function is to express an ‘awareness’ of its economic, social and political status.<sup>63</sup> By contrast, the traditional intellectual is a professional thinker, a scholar, writer or scientist, the most typical of which are the ecclesiastics expounding ‘religious ideology [ . . . ] education, morality, justice, charity, good works, etc.’<sup>64</sup> The first emerges from a newly created social group; the latter is already bound to a present administration.<sup>65</sup> David’s intellectual women are thus deemed organic ‘by virtue of their daughterly intellectual affiliation with the English middle class,’ the ideologies of which are legitimated in their writing; and traditional, because of their attempts to transcend a ‘male-dominated middle class’ into a kind of fantasy realm ‘unfettered by the contingencies of history.’<sup>66</sup> Like Gramsci’s working class, defined as an autonomous thinking body which accumulates and interprets the ideas of a more advanced intelligentsia, David’s women intellectuals are both independent of, and reliant upon ‘the powers generating their authority to speak.’<sup>67</sup>

The religious intellectual too both accepts and resists the religious ideology in which she thinks: organic in her awareness of a culture simultaneously oppressive and liberatory for women; but traditional in that the subject on which she ponders resides in the realm of the cleric. I have chosen Brontë and Rossetti as my case study religious intellectuals because both employ theological ideas within their work to signal their ability (and thus Gramsci’s ‘function’) as intellectuals. The scholarly expression of their writing, I argue, is reliant on and grounded in an intricate discussion and interpretation of religious doctrine, discourse and culture. However mutually inimical, Brontë and

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<sup>62</sup> Antonio Gramsci, ‘The Intellectuals,’ *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp.5-23 (p.9).

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*, p.5.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*, p.7.

<sup>65</sup> David, *Intellectual Women*, pp.4-5.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, p.6.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*, p.225.



Rossetti neatly express two converse sides of the religious intellectual. Brontë, hostile and critical of the strongly Methodist elements in her environment, represents a rebellious individual who both splinters and inadvertently furthers Low Church religious values. Rossetti, devout and respectful of her Tractarian belief-system, appears as a High Church theologian – a disguised Oxford Movement scholar like John Henry Newman or Isaac Williams. The ‘religious intellectual,’ then, is informed by the values outlined in Coleridge’s notion of the clerisy; Mill’s conception of the moral priest; Himmelfarb and Houghton’s understanding of the man of letters; Allen’s idea of the cultural scholar; Collini’s notion of the public moralist; Said’s amateur thinker; and Gramsci’s organic and traditional intellectual.

Employed here to render the thinking identity of nineteenth-century religious women, however, the term religious intellectual will open a discussion of what Said calls the ‘image, the signature, the actual intervention and performance’ of Brontë and Rossetti’s work as intellectual texts (*Representations*, p.10). While much current criticism strives to peel ‘away the religious integuments of a writer’s thought, in search of what appears to be its real or permanent content,’ the methodology adopted here focuses on the religious elements of the text.<sup>68</sup> Such a process proves beneficial in examining nineteenth-century women’s writing, I contend, its religious language often cast aside as overly pious or as a mask covering secular themes. Brontë’s poetry is especially pertinent here, often rendered as secular as its religious language is ignored, a paradox to which I now turn.

## II Emily Brontë

Brontë’s poetry, transcribed into two separate notebooks, Gondal and non-Gondal, is rarely interpreted within its religious context.<sup>69</sup> Her references to God, for example,

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<sup>68</sup> See Barrell, ‘Introduction,’ p.xxvi.

<sup>69</sup> For an overview of Gondal’s narrative, see L. P. Hartley, ‘Emily Brontë in Gondal and Gaaldine,’ *Brontë Society Transactions*, 14:5 (1965), 1-15; Philip Henderson, ‘The Gondal Saga,’ in *The Complete*

stripped of their religious frame, are read as anomalies obscuring the work of an otherwise clearly heretical poet. Marianne Thormählen's recent *The Brontës and Religion* usefully catalogues the religious literature Brontë read, but spends little time on the poetry. Thormählen's elevation of *Wuthering Heights* as a Christian critique of the irreverent sinner, exemplified by Cathy and Heathcliff, proves as equally misleading as that criticism which considers Brontë ignorant of religious issues altogether. The reserved and secretive Brontë of family letters and biographies, for example, leads many critics to pronounce her divorced from the world in which she wrote, viewing her poetry in terms of dreamy reserve and emotional solipsism, her life a riddle to be cracked.<sup>70</sup> The unwillingness of modern criticism to explore Brontë's understanding of theological ideology is, I suggest, a result of two related assumptions concerning her 'romantic' status and her 'mysticism.'<sup>71</sup> The first addresses the question of Brontë's literary

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*Poems of Emily Brontë* (London: The Folio Society, 1951), pp.x-xv; Fannie E. Ratchford, *Gondal's Queen: A Novel in Verse by Emily Jane Brontë* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955); Mary Visick, 'The Gondal Saga,' in *The Genesis of Wuthering Heights* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1948), pp.10-32.

<sup>70</sup> Brontë left little correspondence, amounting to only three letters, no journal outside of the diary papers written with Anne, and divided her time, it seems, between peeling potatoes with her father's domestic servants and wandering the moors with her dogs. Her secrecy is discussed by many critics: Nina Auerbach describes Gondal as 'the secret room in Emily Brontë's imagination,' in *Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Outcasts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.212-229 (p.212); Stevie Davies suggests that Brontë 'guarded the originality of her gift' with an 'aggressive silence,' in *Emily Brontë, Key Women Writers* (Hertfordshire: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1988), p.1; Herbert Dingle remarks, 'Emily Brontë, notwithstanding the many attempts that have been made to elucidate her character, remains one of the most enigmatic figures of English literature,' in *The Mind of Emily Brontë* (London: Martin Brian & O'Keefe, 1974), p.9; Elizabeth Gaskell emphasizes Brontë's reserved nature by discussing her inability to feel comfortable when away from Haworth, in *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p.104; John Hewish argues that Emily Brontë is a 'perilous subject' that presents 'special difficulties of judgement [arising] from the kind of person and writer she was,' calling her work 'introspective,' 'cryptic' and 'private,' in *Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p.9; in an undated letter to Clement K. Shorter, Ellen Nussey writes: 'So very little is known of Emily Brontë that every little detail awakens an interest. Her extreme reserve seemed impenetrable,' in *The Brontës: Their Lives Recorded by their Contemporaries*, ed. E. M. Delafield (England: Ian Hodgkins and Co, 1979), p.89; Clement K. Shorter writes that: 'Emily Brontë is a sphinx of modern literature,' in *The Brontës: Life and Letters*, 2 vols (London: Hodder and Stoughton, MCMVIII), II, p.1; Lawrence J. Starzyk argues for Brontë's visionary and mystical insight in 'Emily Brontë: Poetry in a Mingled Tone,' *Criticism*, 14 (1972), 119-36, and 'The Faith of Emily Brontë's Immortality Creed,' *Victorian Poetry*, 11 (1973), 295-305; and Irene Tayler contends that Brontë's fascination with the Romantic poets stems from her agreement with their tenet that 'life is a process of estrangement from transcendent origins, a story of lost glory and dream,' in *Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p.18.

<sup>71</sup> Brontë criticism still favours *Wuthering Heights* over her poetry, but for readings of the poetry not classed here as addressing her 'romanticism' or 'mysticism,' see Kathryn Burlinson, "'What Language



classification: she is not quite Romantic, but nor is she Victorian. Many critics unproblematically trace Brontë's poetics back to Romanticism, but she is never granted the status of a 'Romantic.' James Fotherington suggests that Brontë 'is romantic in her temper and phrasing' while Irene Tayler proposes that 'Romantic poetry appealed to her so strongly' that it 'served as her [poetical] model.'<sup>72</sup> Alan S. Loxterman suggests that *Wuthering Heights* can be read as a Romantic poem as well as a Victorian novel.<sup>73</sup> Winifred Gérin and John Hewish each elucidate their biographical and critical studies of Brontë with references to all the canonical male Romantic poets.<sup>74</sup> She is compared to Blake by George Bataille, C. Day Lewis and Robin Grove; to Shelley by Edward

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Can Utter the Feeling": Identity in the Poetry of Emily Brontë,' in *Subjectivity and Literature from the Romantics to the Present Day*, ed. Philip Shaw and Peter Stockwell (London and New York: Pinter, 1991), pp.41-48; Herbert Dingle, 'An Examination of Emily Brontë's Poetry from an Unaccustomed Angle,' *Brontë Society Transactions*, 14:4 (1964), 5-10; Denis Donoghue, 'Emily Brontë: The Latitude of Interpretation,' in *The Interpretation of Narrative Theory and Practice* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp.106-24; Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Jill Dix Ghnassia, *Metaphysical Rebellion in the Works of Emily Brontë: A Reinterpretation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); Barbara Hardy, 'The Lyricism of Emily Brontë,' in *The Art of Emily Brontë*, ed. Anne Smith (London: Vision Press, 1976), pp.94-118; Dorothy Mermin, 'The Damsel, the Knight and the Victorian Woman Poet,' *Critical Inquiry*, 13:1 (1986-7), 64-80; Rosalind Miles, 'A Baby God: The Creative Dynamism of Emily Brontë's Poetry,' in Smith, *Brontë*, pp.68-93; Victor Neufeldt, 'Emily Brontë and the Responsible Imagination,' *The Victorian Newsletter*, 43 (1973), 15-21; Maureen Peeck-O'Toole, *Aspects of Lyric in the Poetry of Emily Brontë* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), and 'Lyric and Gender,' *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters*, 18:4 (1988), 319-329; Jesse Roarke, 'The Poems of Emily Brontë: A Reflection,' *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, 38:4 (1972-73), 108-119; Thomas John Winnifrith, 'Poetry: Introduction,' in *Critical Essays on Emily Brontë*, ed. Thomas John Winnifrith (New York: G. K. Hall, 1997), pp.59-60.

<sup>72</sup> James Fotherington, 'The Work of Emily Brontë and the Brontë Problem,' *Brontë Society Transactions*, 2:11 (1900), 107-33, in *Critical Assessments I*, pp.291-312 (p.295); Irene Tayler, *Holy Ghosts*, p.18; for a comprehensive discussion of *Holy Ghosts*, see Peter Allan Dale, 'Varieties of Blasphemy: Feminism and the Brontës,' *Charlottesville Review*, 14 (1992), 281-304; Brontë's verse, like much writing by women before the twentieth century, is perhaps marked by a preoccupation with the literature of the previous generation because female writers had more contact with the contents of their father's libraries than current literature.

<sup>73</sup> See Alan S. Loxterman, 'Wuthering Heights as Romantic Poem and Victorian Novel,' in *A Festschrift for Professor Marguerite Roberts on the Occasion of Her Retirement from Westhampton College University of Richmond, Virginia*, ed. Frieda Elaine Penninger (Virginia: University of Richmond, 1976), 87-100; Algernon Charles Swinburne also argued that *Wuthering Heights* was a 'poem in the fullest and most positive sense of the term,' in *Miscellanies* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1895), pp.260-270, (p.262); see also Walter E. Anderson, 'The Lyrical Form of Wuthering Heights,' *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 47 (1977-78), 112-34; Terence McCarthy, 'A Late Eighteenth-Century Ballad Community: Wuthering Heights,' *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 43:3-4 (1979), 241-251; Sheila Smith, "'At Once Strong and Eerie": The Supernatural in Wuthering Heights and Its Debt to the Traditional Ballad,' *Review of English Studies*, 43:172 (1992), 498-517; Xiaoqin Wang, 'Wuthering Heights in Terms of Emily Brontë's Poetic Creation,' *Foreign Literature Studies*, 31:1 (1986), 38-43.

<sup>74</sup> See Winifred Gérin, *Emily Brontë: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); and Hewish, *Emily Brontë*.

Chitham, Carol Jacobs and Tayler; to Walter Scott by F. R. Leavis; to Byron by Bataille, Jacques Blondel, Helen Brown, David P. Drew, Judi Osborn, Walter L. Reed and Robert Ryan; to Coleridge by Dorothy J. Cooper and Jesse Roarke; to Coleridge, Keats and Wordsworth by Rosalind Miles; to Wordsworth by Nina Auerbach, Edward Chitham and Jonathan Wordsworth; and even to Beethoven by Robert K. Wallace.<sup>75</sup>

Emma Francis argues that such work results in one of two conclusions, conveying either Brontë's commitment to Romantic ideology, notably the sublime, or illuminating an alienated feminine identity caught in the shadow of 'Romantic tradition.'<sup>76</sup> The first conception fashions Brontë as a 'powerful and transgressive' spirit, a masculine figure who 'should have been a man,' as Constantin Héger lamented.<sup>77</sup> C. Day Lewis too, in wondering why such a talented, stable poet would make such a 'fuss' in her verse, concludes that Brontë was trapped within 'the limitation of not being a man.'<sup>78</sup> Day Lewis thus illuminates the second manner in which criticism,

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<sup>75</sup> See George Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Calder and Boyars, 1973); C. Day Lewis, 'The Poetry of Emily Brontë: A Passion for Freedom,' *Brontë Society Transactions*, 13 (1965), 83-95; Robin Grove, "'It would not do": Emily Brontë as Poet,' in Smith, *Brontë*, pp.33-67; Edward Chitham, 'Emily Brontë and Shelley,' in *Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems*, Edward Chitham and Thomas John Winnifrith (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp.58-76; Carol Jacobs, *Uncontainable Romanticism: Shelley, Brontë, Kleist* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989); Tayler, *Holy Ghosts*; F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Doubleday, 1948); Jacques Blondel, 'Emily Brontë: Expérience Spirituelle et Création Poétique' (1955), in *Emily Brontë*, ed. Jean-Pierre Petit, Penguin Critical Anthologies (Middlesex: Penguin Education, 1973), pp.135-150 (p.147); Helen Brown, 'The Influence of Byron on Emily Brontë,' *Modern Language Review*, 34 (1939), 374-381; David P. Drew, 'Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson as Mystic Poets,' *Brontë Society Transactions*, 15:3:79 (1968), 227-32, in Eleanor McNeess, ed., *The Brontë Sisters: Critical Assessments IV: Evaluations of 'The Professor'; Twentieth-Century Studies, 1947-93; Comparative Studies*, 4 vols (Sussex: Helm Information, 1996), pp.464-469 (p.465); Judi Osborn, 'The Byronic Heroine: Is She Different?' *Pleiades*, 10:1 (1990), 45-51; Walter L. Reed, *Meditations on the Hero: A Study of the Romantic Hero in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp.85-137; Ryan, *Romantic Reformation*, p.226; Dorothy J. Cooper, 'The Romantics and Emily Brontë,' *Brontë Society Transactions*, 12:2:62 (1952), 106-112, in McNeess, *Critical Assessments IV*, pp.118-125; Roarke, 'Poems of Emily Brontë'; Rosalind Miles, 'A Baby God: The Creative Dynamism of Emily Brontë's Poetry,' in Smith, *Brontë*, pp.68-93; Nina Auerbach, *Romantic Imprisonment*, pp.212-229; Edward Chitham, *A Life of Emily Brontë* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Jonathan Wordsworth, 'Wordsworth and the Poetry of Emily Brontë,' *Brontë Society Transactions*, 18 (1972), 85-100; Robert K. Wallace, *Emily Brontë and Beethoven: Romantic Equilibrium in Fiction and Music* (London and Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

<sup>76</sup> Emma Francis, "'Conquered good and conquering ill": Femininity, Power and Romanticism in Emily Brontë's Poetry,' *Romanticism and Postmodernism*, ed. Edward Larrissy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.47-72 (pp.52, 57).

<sup>77</sup> Gaskell, *Charlotte Brontë*, p.166.

<sup>78</sup> C. Day Lewis, 'The Poetry of Emily Brontë,' *Brontë Society Transactions*, 13:67 (1957), 83-99, in McNeess, *Critical Assessments I*, pp.540-556 (p.552).



according to Francis, views Brontë: struggling within a masculine realm that consistently threatens to undermine her identity as a poet.<sup>79</sup> Taylor argues that Brontë compensated for this struggle by poetically shaping a 'mother-world,' a device which doubled-up as a guard against the trauma of her mother's death.<sup>80</sup> Davies too asserts that Brontë feminized nature, personifying earth as a 'mother-planet, careful of all her mortal children.'<sup>81</sup> For Margaret Homans, this feminine aspect of 'mother' nature threatens Brontë's poetic identity, predicated on a male Romantic lyrical voice outside of a world to which it responds.<sup>82</sup> Francis replies to these critical trends by calling for a materialist-feminist form of analysis that might position Brontë firmly within Victorian ideology and poetics as a writer able to comment upon, rather than be imprisoned within, Romanticism.<sup>83</sup>

Such a contention is useful here, for only by situating Brontë within her particular historical, and also geographical context, can we understand her as a religious intellectual. In the clamour to position Brontë's poetry within the Romantic tradition, critics have been forced to read its religious overtones as fabled and non-Christian. As Robert Ryan argues, critics tend to take the Romantics seriously as 'religious thinkers' only so far as they articulate 'private intuitions of a noumenal order rather than as active participants in the public religious life of their times.'<sup>84</sup> Revising this assumption, Ryan contends that the Romantics were preoccupied by questions of religion spurred by the Protestant revival.<sup>85</sup> While this revival became progressively conservative, the effects during the 1790s of the wilder Methodist groupings in particular had been radical, causing the labouring classes to secede en masse from the established Church and

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<sup>79</sup> Francis, "'Conquered good,'" p.52; for a reading of Brontë as an 'androgynous' writer, see Nancy W. Hutson, 'The Androgynous Soul,' *Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association*, 9 (1983), 43-56.

<sup>80</sup> Tayler, *Holy Ghosts*, p.37.

<sup>81</sup> Davies, *Heretic*, p.171.

<sup>82</sup> Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.157ff; see the discussion of Homans in Francis, "'Conquered good,'" pp.56ff.

<sup>83</sup> See Francis, "'Conquered good,'" pp.66ff.

<sup>84</sup> Ryan, *Romantic Reformation*, p.8.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid*, pp.1, 10.

political order.<sup>86</sup> As Ryan notes, a religious culture can, arguably, only be changed by religion, an opinion to which dissenting enthusiasts subscribed.<sup>87</sup> It was not only those who rebelled against orthodoxy that warranted the label ‘dissenter,’ however. Writing in 1802, Francis Jeffrey described Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb and Southey as part of a new ‘sect of dissenters’ intent on voicing, just like the itinerant preacher, complex philosophies in simple language.<sup>88</sup> The Romantic prophet-priest, then, earned the title of teacher like Coleridge’s clerk, guiding his community in matters spiritual and ecclesiastical as well as political and cultural.

Ryan’s Romantics re-articulated the religious truths inherent to their society as politically liberating, resisting established religion while forwarding an intellectually challenging moral theology. While Ryan makes a passing reference to Brontë’s poetry as indebted to Byron’s semi-Calvinist deism, many critics refrain from attributing such a concrete theological frame to its religious references.<sup>89</sup> Where religious themes are recognized in Brontë’s poetry, they are deemed numinous asides or, as many critics writing until the late 1970s asserted, as products of Brontë’s ‘mysticism.’ Mysticism is a philosophically and theologically diverse term, indicating many different sets of belief, none of which, I think, are particularly applicable to Brontë. Evelyn Underhill reminds us that mysticism is a ‘word impartially applied to the performances of mediums and the ecstasies of the saints, to “menticulture” and sorcery, dreamy poetry and medieval art, to prayer and palmistry, the doctrinal excesses of Gnosticism’ and ‘to the higher branches of intoxication.’<sup>90</sup> She argues, however, that mysticism, ‘in its pure form’ is the ‘science of union with the Absolute,’ a signifier which embraces all notions of God and Truth. Central to the mystic’s quest is the search for this God or Truth, allowing her to acknowledge ‘that there is something else, some final satisfaction, beyond the ceaseless

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid*, p.25.

<sup>87</sup> Theodore Maynard, *Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1948), p.59, in Ryan, *Romantic Reformation*, p.26.

<sup>88</sup> Francis Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, 1 (1802), p.66, in Ryan, *Romantic Reformation*, pp.31-32.

<sup>89</sup> Ryan, *Romantic Reformation*, p.226; on Brontë’s ‘Calvinism,’ see also Day Lewis, ‘Emily Brontë’ (1957), p.543; and Davies, *Heretic*, pp.138, 143, 146.



stream of sensation which besieges consciousness.’<sup>91</sup> Underhill’s mystics leave ‘the merely intellectual sphere’ to enter the realm of ‘personal passion,’ fusing with the Truth they aspire to amidst an ecstatic feeling of bliss.

The Christian mystic exemplifies this experience, elevated into a fervent union with God by her prayer. Entering into a trance-like alliance with God, the mystic denies that spiritual knowledge is confined to ‘sense impressions,’ ‘any process of intellection,’ or ‘to the unfolding of the content of normal consciousness.’<sup>92</sup> “‘Oh, taste and see!’” cry Underhill’s mystics, “‘We come to you not as thinkers, but as doers,’” experiencing God rather than speculating upon him.<sup>93</sup> It is as if the mystic has entered into God’s consciousness, a kind of ‘transcendental world’ wherein she realizes the divinity of life here and on earth. Caroline Spurgeon thus deems mysticism ‘an atmosphere rather than a system of philosophy’ in which all reality is united in a ‘oneness, of likeness in all things.’<sup>94</sup> This belief in unity, argues Spurgeon, implies that ‘all things about us are but forms or manifestations of one divine life, and that these phenomena are fleeting and impermanent, although the spirit which informs them is immortal and endures.’<sup>95</sup> In short, then, the mystic is catapulted beyond intellectual reality into an immediate embrace with her God, desperate to transcend the material world and seek an immortal position within divine reality. As Spurgeon declares, mystical experience is the ‘flame which feeds’ the mystic’s ‘whole life; and he [sic] is intensely and supremely happy just so far as he is steeped in it.’<sup>96</sup>

Underhill warns her reader, however, to distinguish the mystic from the artist, the first in communion with the transcendental world, the second with the phenomenal. As the mystic ‘is immersed in and reacts to spiritual life,’ so the artist is absorbed by

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<sup>90</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* [1911] (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), p.72.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid*, p.23.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid*, pp.23-24.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid*, p.24.

<sup>94</sup> Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Mysticism in English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), p.3.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid*, p.3.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid*, p.2.

‘intellectual life.’<sup>97</sup> While the individual who is both artist and mystic breaks the binary set up here, Underhill’s point is that the mystical condition is specifically divine, not just inspired and magical, but created from one’s fusion with a God. Spurgeon too insists that the mystic should not be confused with the theologian or philosopher, figures who cannot write mystical commentary because they have not felt the joy of God upon them.<sup>98</sup> Whatever Brontë’s relationship with God amounted to, it was, arguably, not one of exhilarated or beatific bliss. Her poetry may be engaged in a search for transcendent truth, but it cannot be mystical unless Brontë was actually a mystic, transported into the arms of God by an unquestioning and steadfast faith. Brontë’s ‘faith’ was far from steadfast and her poetical investigations into the nature of God express little desire to be fused with him in a mystical manner. As Edward Chitham notes, ‘when people ask “Was Emily Brontë a mystic,” they are seeking to understand her personal attitude to religion and love,’ one which Brontë directly refused to acknowledge.<sup>99</sup> Indirectly, the critic may pinpoint poetical phrases which appear revelatory of religious opinion, but this cannot be deemed ‘mystical’ unless we accept that Brontë was a mystic. As Martin Turnell asserts, Brontë’s ‘habits of mind were not those of the mystic and she has none of the mystic’s renunciation of the created world [refusing] to be taken in by pseudo-religious experience.’<sup>100</sup>

Why, then, do critics consistently address the theme of Brontë’s ‘mysticism’? Turnell harshly suggests that when literary critics use the word ‘mysticism,’ ‘it is almost always a sign of mental indolence, an attempt to give the illusion of precision without the effort required by rigorous thinking.’<sup>101</sup> While the mysticism attributed to Brontë by many critics always seems vaguely Christian, little explication of its ideology is ever

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<sup>97</sup> Underhill, *Mysticism*, p.76.

<sup>98</sup> Spurgeon, *Mysticism*, p.5.

<sup>99</sup> Chitham, *A Life*, p.208; Charlotte recalls: ‘One time I mentioned that someone had asked me what religion I was (with a view to getting me for a partisan), and that I had said that was between God and me. Emily (who was lying on the hearthrug) exclaimed, “That’s right.” This was all I ever heard Emily say on religious subjects,’ in Thomas John Winnifrith, ‘Brontë’s Religion,’ in Winnifrith, *Critical Essays*, pp.8-18 (p.18).

<sup>100</sup> Martin Turnell, ‘The Poetry of Emily Brontë,’ *The Wind and the Rain*, 6 (1949), 43-53, in McNees, *Critical Assessments I*, pp.528-539 (p.538).

offered. An anonymous *Saturday Review* critic claimed in 1868 that ‘mysticism is a common characteristic’ of Brontë’s poems, describing it simply as ‘the natural product of a mind’ striving to ‘penetrate into the abstruse subjects of our being’: philosophical, then, rather than mystical.<sup>102</sup> In 1948, a nameless *Times Literary Supplement* critic rendered Brontë a ‘mystic in Blake’s way,’ but does not offer a portrait of Blakean mysticism for comparison.<sup>103</sup> Margaret Lane confessed in a 1950 essay that she found it hard to relate an undetermined ‘mystic stoicism’ to Brontë’s ‘sheltered life’ as ‘a country parson’s daughter,’ but proceeded to do so anyway.<sup>104</sup> Jacques Blondel argued in 1955 that Brontë’s poetical expression of ‘blissful ecstasy’ and ‘inner struggle’ is equivalent to ‘a higher form of mysticism’ he refrained from delineating.<sup>105</sup> Day Lewis maintained in 1957 that Brontë’s poetry ‘does most remarkably correspond to all we can gather about the experience of the mystics,’ assuming such a group can be collectively profiled, but conceded no definitions.<sup>106</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth asserted in 1972 that Brontë had no ‘control’ over her poetic characters, losing herself in the ‘creative identification’ she made with them thus enacting a ‘mystical experience’ left unspecified.<sup>107</sup>

Whatever these critics signify mysticism to be is unclear, although it seems interchangeably visionary and supernatural, transcendent and Christian. Hence there is an assumed and shared notion of Brontë’s mysticism as a kind of transcendent state, a postulate that reappears in criticism under different guises. Lawrence Starzyk suggests that Brontë’s poetry depicts an ‘inner presence of the divinity’ transcendent of mortal time, produced from her preoccupation with questions of immortality.<sup>108</sup> Christine Gallant contends that Brontë poetically aimed to transcend the earthly realm into a

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid*, p.538.

<sup>102</sup> Anon, ‘Poetesses,’ *Saturday Review*, 23 May 1868, 678-9, in McNees, *Critical Assessments IV*, pp.399-405 (pp.402-3).

<sup>103</sup> Anon, ‘Emily Brontë,’ *The Times Literary Supplement*, 713, 18 December 1948, in McNees, *Critical Assessments IV*, pp.96-97 (p.97).

<sup>104</sup> Margaret Lane, ‘The Mysterious Genius of Emily Brontë,’ *The Listener*, 44 (1950), 749-51, in McNees, *Critical Assessments IV*, pp.111-117 (p.112); also in Margaret Lane, *Purely for Pleasure* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966), pp.139-151.

<sup>105</sup> Blondel, *Emily Brontë*, pp.145, 147.

<sup>106</sup> Day Lewis, ‘Emily Brontë’ (1957), p.551.

<sup>107</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth, ‘Wordsworth,’ pp.90, 98.



Feminine and chthonic sphere owning a distinctly mystical resonance.<sup>109</sup> For David P. Drew, ‘any attempt to “classify” Brontë into a “type[ ]” of mystic’ is arbitrary anyway, although he tellingly resolves that she is closer to the ‘visionary’ St Augustine and St John of the Cross than the ‘intellectual’ Nicholas of Cusa.<sup>110</sup> Spurgeon also suggests that Brontë is not so much an intellectual as a mystical poet who clothed her ‘thoughts’ in ‘the language of philosophy.’<sup>111</sup> Spurgeon notes that the ‘supreme mystic experience’ rendered in Brontë’s poetry ‘could only have been written by one who had knowledge of it,’ but later concludes that Brontë ‘read little of philosophy or metaphysics, and probably had never heard of the mystics.’<sup>112</sup> Like Drew, Spurgeon confers a mystic status onto Brontë that allows her to be recognized as a genius, but not an intellectual. Critics who undertake the attribution of any particular form of mysticism to Brontë would seem to run the risk of having to imply that she understands what she is involved with, thus threatening her identity as a secretive sphinx devoid of intellectual orientation.

This misty, rather than mystic, categorization of Brontë, then, masks a perhaps less ecstatic poet, more Shirley Keeldar than Teresa of Ávila.<sup>113</sup> What critics understand as the expression of mysticism in Brontë’s poetry, then, might be more usefully traced to another form of religious experience to be observed in early nineteenth-century Yorkshire. I argue here that this form of religious experience is enthusiasm, specifically Methodist enthusiasm. Enthusiasm signifies a transcendental state wherein the subject feels herself to be possessed by a god, supernatural authority or political cause to which she is excessively devoted.<sup>114</sup> Obsessed by the Christian God, the specifically religious enthusiast claimed that she endured a sudden and inspired conversion experience,

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<sup>108</sup> See Starzyk, ‘Poetry in a Mingled Tone’ and ‘Immortality Creed.’

<sup>109</sup> Christine Gallant, ‘The Archetypal Feminine in Emily Brontë’s Poetry,’ *Women’s Studies*, 7:1-2 (1980), 79-84 (pp.88-89).

<sup>110</sup> Drew, ‘Emily Brontë,’ p.469.

<sup>111</sup> Spurgeon, *Mysticism*, p.72.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid*, p.81.

<sup>113</sup> Blondel compares Brontë to St Teresa of Ávila, in ‘Emily Brontë,’ p.146.

<sup>114</sup> See Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Said also compares current politics to religious enthusiasm, using the example of ‘former Yugoslavia – with results in ethnic cleansing, mass slaughter and unending conflict that are horrible to contemplate,’ in *Representations*, p.84.

wherein a kind of overdose of religion blinded her to anything outside of faith. The enthusiast was thus assumed to be at best whimsical and at worst, dangerous and deluded. Enthusiasm was condemned not only because it purported to enable a personal encounter with God, but also because it was widely associated with the new radical movement of Methodism. Reverend William Bowman, for example, attacked enthusiasts in a pamphlet damning Methodism, judging his targets as ‘divinely and supernaturally inspired by the Holy Ghost, to declare the Will of God to mankind.’<sup>115</sup> This was a ‘shocking Blasphemy[ ],’ Bowman complained, as did many commentators, including David Hume and the third Earl of Shaftesbury.<sup>116</sup> Even Wesley was forced to distance Methodism from enthusiasm in a sermon of 1750, defending his religious principles against Bishop George Lavington’s damning *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar’d* (1749), a debate which I address in chapter two.

Various descriptions of enthusiasm and enthusiasts circulated during the Evangelical revival as Susie Tucker documents, spurred by the experiences of fanatical believers.<sup>117</sup> Edward Coles wrote in the 1696 *English Dictionary* that the enthusiast should be rendered as ‘one pretending to divine revelation and inspiration.’<sup>118</sup> The *Glossographia Anglicana Nova* of 1707 deemed enthusiasts ‘people who fancy themselves inspired with the Divine Spirit,’ consequently assuming ‘a true sight and knowledge of things.’<sup>119</sup> Thomas Dyche and William Pardon described the enthusiast as ‘a person poisoned with the notion of being divinely inspired, when he is not’ in *A New*

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<sup>115</sup> William Bowman, *The Imposture of Methodism Display’d in a Letter to the Inhabitants of the Parish of Dewsbury, Occasioned by the Rise of a Certain Modern Sect of Enthusiasts (Among them) call’d Methodists* (London: Joseph Lord, 1740), in W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of ‘Love Divine’: The Theological Development of Early Wesleyan Methodism in Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm* (Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1989), p.13.

<sup>116</sup> David Hume, ‘Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,’ in *Writings on Religion*, ed. Antony Flew (Chicago: Open Court, 1992), pp.3-9; Earl of Shaftesbury, ‘On Enthusiasm,’ in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Times etc* [1699], in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin, 1995), pp.90-96.

<sup>117</sup> Susie Tucker, *Enthusiasm: A Study in Semantic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); for a discussion of Tucker, see Gunter, *The Limits of ‘Love Divine’*.

<sup>118</sup> Edward Coles, *English Dictionary* (1696), in Tucker, *Enthusiasm*, p.15.

<sup>119</sup> *Glossographia Anglicana Nova* (1707), in Tucker, *Enthusiasm*, pp.15-16.

*General English Dictionary* for 1744.<sup>120</sup> John Wesley too offered a dictionary definition in *The Complete English Dictionary* (1764), positioning enthusiasm as ‘religious madness, fancied inspiration.’<sup>121</sup> Most influential was Samuel Johnson’s 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language* which portrayed enthusiasm first, as ‘a vain belief of private revelation; a vain confidence of divine favour,’ and second, as an ‘elevation of fancy, exaltation of ideas.’<sup>122</sup> It is perhaps Nathaniel Bailey’s interpretation of enthusiasm in the 1721 *Universal Etymological Dictionary* that most accurately reflects how I use the notion of enthusiasm here, however. Bailey wrote: ‘Enthusiasm means a prophetick or poetical rage of fury, which transports the mind, raises and inflames the imagination, and makes it think and express things extraordinary and surprising.’<sup>123</sup>

Bailey’s definition immediately differs from those above in that it does not overtly condemn what it describes, refusing to pillory the enthusiast as misled, erratic and foolish. Moreover, it accentuates the manner in which enthusiasm elevates the imagination onto a higher and seemingly divine plane, an experience non-concurrent with the mystic’s fusion with God. The enthusiast is catapulted out of her reality by the imagination rather than faith, pondering on that which is ‘extraordinary,’ even frightening, rather than seeking a known Christian God. Alarmed but uplifted, Brontë’s poetical enthusiast, I argue, enters the sublime, a conception the poet learned from Burke’s *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Many of Brontë’s poetical narrators appear to experience the sublime, desperate to transcend a specific situation rooted in reality. Commonly, the narrator will speak from within the confines of a prison or cell, released temporarily by a sublime experience, but always sprung back into a gloomy and oppressive environment. Why, then, should these narrators be considered enthusiasts rather than aesthetes or

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<sup>120</sup> Thomas Dyche and William Pardon, *A New General English Dictionary* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1744), in Tucker, *Enthusiasm*, p.16.

<sup>121</sup> John Wesley, *The Complete English Dictionary* (1764) in Tucker, *Enthusiasm*, p.17; Tucker notes that the work was originally anonymous, and directs the reader to G. H. Vallins, *The Wesleys and the English Language* (1957) for the authorship.

<sup>122</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) in Tucker, *Enthusiasm*, p.17.

<sup>123</sup> Nathaniel Bailey, *Universal Etymological Dictionary* (1721), in Tucker, *Enthusiasm*, p.16.



philosophers experiencing the awe and emotion of the sublime? The answer to such a question lies in Brontë's own response to religion. She is certainly critical of vain believers who refuse to engage with what they worship, but, I contend, her discourse remains fixed within Methodist ideology.

Brontë conveys her frustration at this confinement, I think, through the enthusiast narrators within many of her poems. First, the narrator appears delirious, driven mad by her imprisonment. Now in a state of insanity, a condition Brontë renders in accord with contemporary medical definitions as I argue in chapter two, the narrator turns to religion, investing in its awesome sublimity as a way of transcending the prison cell. The narrator cannot interpret her sublime experience outside the language of religion, however, being trapped, like Brontë, within religious ideology. Her frenzied sublime encounter thus signals her enthusiastic nature, the very sublimity she believed would liberate her from religion reconverts her back into it. Like Brontë too, the narrator simultaneously aspires towards religion, via the sublime, but is repelled by it, ensnared within its discursive web. Religion is conceived as a prison-space, then, an argument I advance in chapter three amidst an explication of Brontë's religious sublime.<sup>124</sup>

Methodism seems to have literally enclosed Brontë, embracing almost half a million members in Britain between 1740 and 1840, its greatest numbers concentrated in Cornwall, and notably, Yorkshire.<sup>125</sup> The West Riding district of Yorkshire, of which Haworth was part, had over 17 000 members by 1796, supported by Methodist schools such as the Wesleyan Woodhouse Grove, where Brontë's father, Patrick Brontë, was an examiner, and the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge attended by Brontë from

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<sup>124</sup> Several critics comment on Brontë's use of the prison or dungeon as a metaphor or trope in her poetry, see Auerbach, *Romantic Imprisonment*, pp.212-229; Richard Benvenuto, *Emily Brontë* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), p.58; Teddi Lynn Chichester, 'Evading "Earth's Dungeon Tomb": Emily Brontë, A.G.A., and the Fatally Feminine,' *Victorian Poetry*, 1:29 (1991), 1-15; Lyn Pykett, *Emily Brontë* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>125</sup> David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p.12; see also J. A. Hargreaves, 'Methodism and Luddism in Yorkshire 1812-1813,' *Northern History*, 26 (1990), 160-185; Moira Long and Bessie Maltby, 'Personal Mobility in Three West Riding Parishes 1777-1812,' *Local Population Studies*, 24 (1980), 13-25; John Q. Smith, 'Occupational Groups Among the Early Methodists of the Keighley Circuit,' *Church History*, 57:2 (1988), 187-196.

the age of six.<sup>126</sup> Methodism prevailed over Brontë's environment and her writing, then, and while she is critical of Methodism she is equally unwilling to let go of perhaps her strongest influence.

Several critics have commented upon the poet's historical position within Methodism, rather than Romanticism or mysticism. G. Elsie Harrison focuses on the subject in numerous studies, including *Methodist Good Companions*, *Haworth Parsonage: A Study of Wesley and the Brontës* and *The Clue to the Brontës*.<sup>127</sup> Positioning Methodism as the 'clue' to the Brontës, Harrison attests to Haworth's Wesleyan heritage.<sup>128</sup> She argues that the 'essence of old Methodism' submerged the Brontë household, preached by Patrick Brontë, whose poems, like Emily's, were 'couched in the metre of Wesleyan hymns.'<sup>129</sup> More fervently Methodist was Aunt Branwell whom Brontë replaced as the 'strong centre of the household,' according to Harrison, sustaining her religious beliefs too.<sup>130</sup> Harrison reads *Wuthering Heights* with reference to Wesley's journal, the sermons of Jabez Bunting and a letter by the Methodist William Grimshaw, curate of Haworth from 1742.<sup>131</sup> She even attributes Brontë's refusal to take opiates while dying to a Methodist aversion to drug-intake as that which interfered with God's natural plan.<sup>132</sup> Harrison imposes a Methodist frame upon all of the Brontës, but it is 'Emily' that she singles out as the writer who 'achieved her reputation on her Methodist background.'<sup>133</sup> Brontë, Harrison claims, 'had the good sense to stay at home with God and love and the Yorkshire moors' reading "mad

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<sup>126</sup> John Baxter, 'The Great Yorkshire Revival, 1792-6: A Study of Mass Revival among the Methodists,' *Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, ed. Michael Hill (London: S.C.M. Press, 1974), pp.46-76 (p.66).

<sup>127</sup> G. Elsie Harrison, *Methodist Good Companions* (London: The Epworth Press, 1935); *Haworth Parsonage: A Study of Wesley and the Brontës* (London: The Epworth Press, 1937); *The Clue to the Brontës* (London: Methuen, 1948).

<sup>128</sup> The Haworth curacy was in fact a unique arrangement of Elizabeth I, whereby local trustees made the appointment. By Brontë's time, these included dissenters. Patrick Brontë's precise institutional position as an establishment parson was hence rather ambiguous in relation to Methodist dissent, a position reflected by Brontë in her poetry.

<sup>129</sup> Harrison, *Clue*, p.4; Harrison makes the same point in, *Haworth Parsonage*, p.17.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid*, pp.130-131.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid*, pp.164-166.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid*, p.175.

<sup>133</sup> Harrison, *Haworth Parsonage*, p.6.

Methodist Magazines” and imbibing ‘the essence of that Grimshaw legend.’<sup>134</sup> These ‘mad Methodist Magazines, full of miracles and apparitions’ appear in Charlotte’s novel *Shirley* (1849), itself, as Juliet Barker suggests, a ‘portrayal of Emily as she might have been.’<sup>135</sup> If *Shirley* Keeldar is Emily Brontë, then *Shirley* the novel is a ‘Methodist book’ argues Harrison, a logic that marks much of her conjectural commentary.<sup>136</sup>

Many of Harrison’s points, however, are substantiated by other critics. Amber M. Adams positions Thomas Tighe, vicar of Drumballyroney, County Down, as a link between Patrick Brontë, for whom he arranged entrance to St Johns, Cambridge, and John Wesley, with whom he was ‘intimately associated.’<sup>137</sup> G. R. Balleine, Michael Baumber, John Lock and W. T. Dixon focus on William Grimshaw as an important influence on the Brontës.<sup>138</sup> Valentine Cunningham and Stevie Davies both note Brontë’s understanding of enthusiasm as a ‘referent for passion,’ although they do not relate it to her poetry as I do here.<sup>139</sup> Davies too comments on the ‘Methodist-inclined form of Anglicanism’ Patrick practised at Haworth Church.<sup>140</sup> James Fotherington notes that the Brontës’ ‘Puritan ethics, their evangelical creed and seriousness’ coloured the ‘spirit’ of their writing.<sup>141</sup> Susan Howe compares Brontë’s poetry to the preaching style

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<sup>134</sup> *ibid*, p.38.

<sup>135</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, [1848-1849] (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), p.379; Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1996), p.612; for other biographical and critical studies of Brontë, see Chitham, *Emily Brontë*; Edward Chitham and Tom Winniffrith, *Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems* (London: Macmillan, 1983); Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë: The Artist as Free Woman* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1983); Delafield, *The Brontës*; Katherine Frank, *Emily Brontë: A Chainless Soul* (London: Penguin, 1992); Gérin, *Emily Brontë*; Hewish, *Emily Brontë*; James Kavanagh, *Emily Brontë* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); Bettina L. Knapp, *The Brontës: Branwell, Anne, Emily, Charlotte* (New York: Continuum, 1991); Muriel Spark and Derek Stanford, *Emily Brontë: Her Life and Work* (London: Owen, 1975); Steven Vine, *Emily Brontë* (London: Prentice Hall, 1998).

<sup>136</sup> Harrison, *Clue*, p.180.

<sup>137</sup> Amber M. Adams, ‘Patronage and Poverty in County Down: The Case of Patrick Brontë,’ *Ulster Folklife*, 33 (1987), 26-31 (p.27).

<sup>138</sup> G. R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (London: Church Book Room Press, 1908), pp.52-57, 231; Michael Baumber, ‘William Grimshaw, Patrick Brontë and the Evangelical Revival,’ *History Today*, 42 (1992), 25-31; John Lock and Canon W. T. Dixon, *A Man of Sorrow: The Life, Letters and Times of the Reverend Patrick Brontë 1777-1861* (London: Nelson, 1965).

<sup>139</sup> Valentine Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), p.124; Davies, *Emily Brontë*, p.145.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid*, pp.139, 154.

<sup>141</sup> Fotherington, ‘Brontë Problem,’ p.309.



of the American Methodist, Jonathan Edwards.<sup>142</sup> J. Hillis Miller notes the striking similarity between Brontë and Wesley's prose presentations of nature.<sup>143</sup> Katherine M. Sorensen traces the details of Heathcliff's death back to the demise of the Methodist John Dudley as recorded in a 1750 journal entry by John Wesley.<sup>144</sup> Brontë's Methodist background is easily established, then, but the nature of its effect upon her remains uncertain. While Frank Baker, for example, declares that Grimshaw's 'ecstatic devotions' and 'his robust preaching' especially affected 'Emily,' Davies argues that his religious ideals disgusted her.<sup>145</sup> Even the family teapot, belonging to Aunt Branwell and bearing 'the Reverend Grimshaw's motto: "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain," poured a 'dire and repressive cup of tea,' according to Davies.<sup>146</sup> Reverend Dr. Bruce claims that Brontë's poems are written as hymns revealing a pantheistic poet who 'would have been a happier woman had she sought more communion with God.'<sup>147</sup> Ken C. Burrows offers a counter-suggestion, proposing that Brontë manipulated Methodist hymn metre to create an 'anti-hymn' genre which rejected 'a form of worship' she 'found stultifying,' and enacted an 'indictment' of Methodism as that which imprisoned the spirit.<sup>148</sup>

Like Burrows, I consider Brontë's to be poetry locked within Methodist thought and language, but argue that it fails to break out of such an inexorable ideology. Brontë rebelled against conventional religion by refusing to teach in her father's Sunday School

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<sup>142</sup> Susan Howe, 'Part Two: Childe Emily to the Dark Tower Came,' *Code of Signals: Recent Writing in Poetics*, ed. Michael Palmer (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1983), pp.196-218.

<sup>143</sup> J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp.157-211; Miller also remarks upon Brontë's relationship to natural theology, a point taken up in Barbara Munson Goff, "'Between Natural Theology and Natural Selection": Breeding the Human Animal in *Wuthering Heights*,' *Victorian Studies*, 27:4 (1984), 477-508.

<sup>144</sup> Katherine M. Sorensen, "'From Religious Ecstasy to Romantic Fulfilment": John Wesley's *Journal* and the Death of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*,' *Victorian Newsletter*, 82 (1992), 1-5.

<sup>145</sup> Frank Baker, *William Grimshaw: 1708-1763* (London: The Epworth Press, 1963), p.267; Davies, *Heretic*, p.19.

<sup>146</sup> Davies, *Heretic*, pp.18-19.

<sup>147</sup> Reverend Dr. Bruce, 'The Poems of the Brontë Sisters,' *Brontë Society Transactions*, 2:9 (1899), 37-48, in McNees, *Critical Assessments I*, pp.476-487 (pp.483, 485).

<sup>148</sup> Ken C. Burrows, 'Some Remembered Strain: Methodism and the Anti-Hymns of Emily Brontë,' *West Virginia University Philological Papers*, 24 (1977), 48-61 (p.52); on the hymn form, see Richard Arnold, *The English Hymn: Studies in a Genre* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995); Louis F. Benson, *The English*

or attend Church, preferring to spend Sundays walking across the moors. Winifred Gérin significantly remarks, however, that Patrick was entirely at ease with his daughter's decisions, recognizing that Wesley himself had 'chosen to stand under an oak tree or in a natural arena to deliver himself of his Gospel of Hope.'<sup>149</sup> Brontë's presence at Church was unusual as a contemporary observer noted, recording that Brontë 'sat in the seat with its back to the pulpit, looking straight ahead of her.'<sup>150</sup> Davies concludes from this testimony that Brontë felt uncomfortable and 'not very pleasant' in Church, and yet Methodist believers betrayed the same intense, earnest quietude while in prayer. I do not suggest here that Brontë was a Methodist or even a Christian in any conventional sense, but Brontë did not, I argue, simply dismiss religion. Employing notions like enthusiasm and the religious sublime within her poetry, she offers the reader an insight into her own understanding of an ideology by which she felt imprisoned. Brontë was drawn to Methodism as a vehicle for conveying passion, then, but in the process was overpowered by the very intensity of feeling she sought to exploit.

### III Christina Rossetti

Rossetti also revealed her intellectual grasp of religion within her poetry, and yet critics often refuse to acknowledge this insight, blinded by her corresponding expression of an intense Christian faith. Germaine Greer, for example, declares that Rossetti's 'religion is a matter of devout sentiment, rather than an intellectual apprehension of the nature of God.'<sup>151</sup> 'As a religious poet,' Greer writes, Rossetti 'must be listed among incorrigibly minor figures, a bare cut above the horde of pious ladies who penned hymns in the

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*Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915); Donald Davie, *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>149</sup> Gérin, *Emily Brontë*, pp.148-9.

<sup>150</sup> John Greenwood, in 'Letters, Diary and Documents of John Greenwood belonging to Mrs Mary Preston, Haworth, Yorkshire' (n.d.), in Gérin, *Emily Brontë*, pp.148-9.

<sup>151</sup> Germaine Greer, *Slip-Shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet* (London: Viking, 1995), p.359; see also Curran, 'Lyric Voice,' which makes the same point.

nineteenth century.’<sup>152</sup> Rejected by many critics for her supposed girlish piety, Rossetti was more positively understood by her Victorian contemporaries, heralded as ‘the High Priestess of Pre-Raphaelitism’ by Edmund Gosse.<sup>153</sup> Mackenzie Bell emphasized her knowledge of Latin writers such as Metastasio, Tasso and Ariosto.<sup>154</sup> An anonymous critic writing in an 1895 *Dial* claimed that Rossetti’s poetical ability was ‘unsurpassed and perhaps unequalled by any of her contemporaries.’<sup>155</sup> Arthur Symons remarked that Rossetti’s poetry was never didactic or preaching, but caused the reader to feel as if she had eavesdropped upon a ‘dialogue of the soul with God.’<sup>156</sup> Lionel Johnson wrote of Rossetti’s work in an 1896 copy of the *Academy*: ‘This is more than imagination, it is nothing less than vision.’<sup>157</sup> Alice Meynell suggested that her poetry conveyed Christian faith ‘more fervently than would a chorus hymeneal’ in an 1895 *New Review*.<sup>158</sup> An anonymous reviewer in the *Athenaeum* contended that Rossetti’s sonnets equalled Shakespeare’s, and she was also hailed in the *Literary World* as a match for Dante and Petrarch.<sup>159</sup> The *Saturday Review* judged her more highly than the best-selling religious poet, John Keble; and Amy Levy conveyed her esteem for a poet true to ‘her own voice’ in an 1888 *Woman’s World*.<sup>160</sup> A tide of critics praised ‘Goblin Market’ for its supernatural yet political content, and her verse collections were repeatedly reprinted in

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<sup>152</sup> Greer, *Slip-Shod*, p.359.

<sup>153</sup> Edmund Gosse, ‘Christina Rossetti,’ *Century Magazine*, 46 (1893), in Edna Kotin Charles, *Christina Rossetti: Critical Perspectives, 1862-1982* (London and Toronto: Selinsgrove, Susquehanna UP, 1985), p.15; on Rossetti’s Pre-Raphaelitism, see Lionel Stevenson, *The Pre-Raphaelite Poets* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), pp.78-122.

<sup>154</sup> Mackenzie Bell, *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study* (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1898), p.319, in Charles, *Critical Perspectives*, p.17.

<sup>155</sup> Anon., ‘Christina Georgina Rossetti,’ *Dial*, 16 January 1895, pp.37-39, in Charles, *Critical Perspectives*, p.25.

<sup>156</sup> Arthur Symons, ‘Miss Rossetti’s Poetry,’ *London Quarterly Review*, 68, July 1887, p.344, in Charles, *Critical Perspectives*, p.27.

<sup>157</sup> Lionel Johnson, ‘Literature: Miss Rossetti and Miss Alexander,’ *Academy*, 25 July 1896, p.59, in Charles, *Critical Perspectives*, p.29.

<sup>158</sup> Alice Meynell, ‘Christina Rossetti,’ *New Review*, 12, February 1893, p.203, in Charles, *Critical Perspectives*, p.30.

<sup>159</sup> Anon., ‘Miss Rossetti’s New Poems,’ *Athenaeum* 10 September 1881; and Anon., ‘The Rossettis,’ *Literary World*, 5 November 1881, p.396, in Charles, *Critical Perspectives*, pp.28, 39.

<sup>160</sup> Anon., ‘Miss Rossetti’s Poems,’ *Saturday Review*, February 1896, p.196; and Amy Levy, ‘The Poetry of Christina Rossetti,’ *Woman’s World* (London) 1, February 1888, p.180, in Charles, *Critical Perspectives*, pp.40, 61.



Britain and abroad attesting to a poet many thought should receive the laureate after Tennyson.

Rossetti's status as a poet expressive of Christian faith and devotional love, however, also included a professional and intellectual persona as a prominent religious observer. As W. Robertson Nicoll notes of Rossetti in an 1898 *Bookman*: 'She was, above other things, a Christian of the Churchly type, and it is as an interpreter of Christianity, or rather this phase of Christianity, that she will live.'<sup>161</sup> Nicoll's comment implies two assumptions concerning Rossetti: first, it suggests that she was part of a Church tradition, rather than the exponent of a mystical or personal spirituality; and secondly, that she excelled, not as a lady versifier of her banal love for God, but as an interpreter of a historical phase of Christianity. This phase was Tractarianism, also known as the Oxford Movement, a High Church reaction against the erasure of Catholic elements within the Church of England. Considered part of a Popish plot by its critics, the Oxford Movement thought of itself as the defender of the Anglican Church, rescuing it from Evangelical liberalism. Its members outlined their Anglo-Catholic theology within a series of ninety tracts written between 1833 and 1841, ranging from brief pamphlets to scholarly dissertations and collected as the *Tracts for the Times*. The Tracts argued that the Church of England should refashion itself as a divine institution by according with Catholic ritual, like mass and confession; and Catholic doctrines, such as Apostolic Succession and Prayers for the Dead.

Most notable here, however, was the Tracts' emphasis on the Movement's intellectual foundations, born from a University environment and nicknamed 'British Museum religion.'<sup>162</sup> Tractarianism valued the intellect because it enabled the believer to understand the tradition of the Church through its order and sacraments, rather than via mere enthusiastic feeling. Evangelical Protestantism, whether in its 'Low Church'

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<sup>161</sup> W. Robertson Nicoll, 'Mr Bell's Christina Rossetti,' *Bookman*, 13, February 1898, p.154, in Charles, *Critical Perspectives*, p.65.

<sup>162</sup> Nigel Yates, *Buildings, Faith and Worship: The Liturgical Arrangement of Anglican Churches 1600-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp.144-145; for more on this subject see Owen Chadwick, 'Last

version within Anglicanism, or its Wesleyan Methodist variant, was considered backward and incompetent, disrespectful of religious mystery because intellectually unable to understand how to deal with it. Rossetti was deeply attracted to Tractarianism, in part, because its Catholic leanings and promotion of the intellect were each aspects inherent to her background. While Rossetti's mother, Frances Polidori, was an earnest High Church Anglican, her father, Rossetti's grandfather, was a nominal Catholic. Frances' brothers followed their father into the Catholic Church, and she married another anti-Papal Catholic, Gabriele Rossetti.<sup>163</sup> Gabriele was an ardent intellectual, poet and writer, obtaining the chair of Italian at Kings College London in 1830 and encouraging all of his children to study hard. He addressed his daughter Maria as the 'daughter of Clio' after the muse of history and scholarship, and called Christina *vivace* (lively), Dante Gabriel *ingegnoso* (clever) and William *saggio* (wise).<sup>164</sup> The children's later publications added to their father's own work, notably *Disquisitions on the Anti-Papal Spirit which produced the Reformation: Its Secret Influence on the Literature of Europe in General and of Italy in Particular* (1834), a 'vast study of Dante and his contemporaries, as forerunners of the Reformation and freemasonry,' Marsh contends.<sup>165</sup> Religion was thus confirmed as an arena of debate and interpretation within the family, and while Rossetti's poetry and devotional commentaries are most well-known, Maria also published on religious subjects and would have made, Marsh notes, 'a capital ordinand.'<sup>166</sup>

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Enchantments: Medievalism and the Early Anglo-Catholic Movement,' *Studies in Medievalism*, 4 (1992), 170-186.

<sup>163</sup> For a discussion of Rossetti's family background see Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1994), pp.15ff; notably, Frances' eldest brother was John Polidori, Byron's physician who was present at the Villa Diodati on Lake Geneva when Mary Shelley began *Frankenstein* (1818). He committed suicide in 1820 because of gambling debts. He is today credited with writing the first vampire story, *The Vampyre* (1819). See David Morrill, "'Twilight is not good for maidens': Uncle Polidori and the Psychodynamics of Vampirism in 'Goblin Market,'" *Victorian Poetry*, 28:1 (1990), 1-16.

<sup>164</sup> Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, pp.21-23.

<sup>165</sup> *ibid*, p.36.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid*, p.241; see Maria Francesca Rossetti, *Letters to my Bible Class* (1859); Maria also published *Exercises in Idiomatic Italian through Literal Translation from the English* (1867); and *Shadow of Dante* (1871).

Rossetti too addresses religious subjects with the insight and knowledge of a priest, rather than as a member of the laity. With her mother and sister, Rossetti attended what Canon Henry W. Burrows called the 'leading church' in the Oxford Movement, Christ Church, Albany Street in London (William and Dante Gabriel became disillusioned with religion early in their lives).<sup>167</sup> Christ Church captivated a large congregation, which included Margaret Oliphant and Sara Coleridge, and many prominent Oxford Movement men preached there.<sup>168</sup> Edward Bouverie Pusey and Henry Edward Manning were both drawn to Christ Church by its charismatic rector, William Dodsworth, whose sermons on Advent greatly affected Rossetti.<sup>169</sup> In chapter four, I focus on Pusey as a mysterious and ascetic character Rossetti initially sought to emulate, fascinated by his role in the introduction of Catholic ritual into the Church space. Pusey's extreme devotional behaviour, which involved vigorous fasting and the wearing of a hair shirt, caused many to view him as a foreboding agent of Rome, although he did not convert to Roman Catholicism as did Newman, Dodsworth and Manning. Rossetti too refrained from crossing over to Rome, but, like Pusey, was drawn to many of its practices. Her poetry was welcomed by many Roman Catholics able to read expressions of their faith within it. The *Catholic World* asked of Rossetti's verse in 1876: 'What in the wide realm of English poetry is more beautiful than this?' naming her the 'Queen of the Pre-Raphaelite School.'<sup>170</sup> The same reviewer notably claimed that while her secular poetry was 'flat and discordant,' her religious verse

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<sup>167</sup> Henry William Burrows, *The Half-Century of Christ Church, St. Pancras, Albany Street* (London: 1887), in Mary Arseneau, 'Incarnation and Interpretation: Christina Rossetti, the Oxford Movement and "Goblin Market,"' *Victorian Poetry*, 31:1 (1993), 79-93 (p.80); on Dante Gabriel's influence upon Rossetti, see Alison Chapman, 'Defining the Female Subject: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Manuscript Revisions to Christina Rossetti's Poetry,' *Victorian Poetry*, 35:2 (1997), 139-56; Gail Lynn Goldberg, 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Revising Hand": His Illustrations for "Goblin Market,"' *Victorian Poetry*, 20:3-4 (1982), 145-159; Janna Knittel, 'Knocking at Paradise: Christina Rossetti rewrites the "Blessed Damozel,"' *Victorian Review: Journal of Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada*, 24:1 (1998), 12-28.

<sup>168</sup> Greer, *Slip-Shod*, 360; Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.57.

<sup>169</sup> See John O. Waller, 'Christ's Second Coming: Christina Rossetti and the Premillenarianist William Dodsworth,' *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 73 (1969), 465-82.

<sup>170</sup> Anon., 'Christina Rossetti's Poems,' *Catholic World*, 24 October 1876, pp.126-127, in Charles, *Critical Perspectives*, pp.24, 44.



rendered Rossetti 'an inspired prophetess or priestess chanting a sublime chant or giving voice to a world's sorrow and lament.'<sup>171</sup>

It was Catholic ritual, however, that most delighted Rossetti, a sort of aesthetico-medieval ceremonial recreated at Christ Church through the use of altar lights, candles, veils, the elevation of the Eucharist and the burning of incense.<sup>172</sup> Gothic in essence, ritualism embraced the spirit of God within a clandestine Church milieu, hiding him away as a mysterious secret within the altar space, itself often encased by a large screen.<sup>173</sup> The chancel screen was brought back into fashion in the nineteenth century by High Church groups such as the Cambridge Camden Society, the Cambridge equivalent of the 'Oxford' Movement, and architects such as Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin.<sup>174</sup> As I discuss in chapter five, Rossetti valued the screen as that which veiled God from her as it concealed her before God, guarding her against the crime of pride or exhibitionism, sins she was vividly aware of as can be seen in her preoccupation with the theme of vanity.<sup>175</sup> Removing God from general access was essential to Tractarianism, confirmed by its advocacy of the doctrine of reserve which constructed God as a secret the believer is unworthy to comprehend until Judgement Day. One might advance towards this secret through the study of scripture, but the intellectually incompetent were to be denied an audience with God. As Isobel Armstrong notes, 'Christian meaning,' Tractarians believed, 'should not be carelessly exposed to misprision (and to democratic reading).'<sup>176</sup>

Tractarianism thus promoted a religious elite similar to Coleridge's clerisy, one whose members claimed the prerogative of producing scholarly commentary on

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<sup>171</sup> *ibid*, p.59.

<sup>172</sup> See 'The Principal Clergy of London: Classified According to their opinions on the Great Church questions of the day' 1844, Bodleian Library, MS Add c.290, which I discuss in chapter three.

<sup>173</sup> On Rossetti's Gothic form, see Mary E. Finn, *Writing the Incommensurable: Kierkegaard, Rossetti and Hopkins* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), pp.134ff.

<sup>174</sup> On the Cambridge Camden Society see James F. White, *The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962); see also Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *A Treatise on Chancel Screens and Rood Lofts: Their Antiquity, Use and Symbolic Signification* (London: Charles Dolman, 1851).

<sup>175</sup> See, for example, Raymond Chapman, *Faith and Revolt: Studies in the Literary Influence of the Oxford Movement* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p.185.

scripture, whether in sermon or poetical form. Rossetti forged her role as a Tractarian intellectual by engaging with many of its arcana on a scholarly level, and I focus on ritualism and reserve as two important themes within her poetry and devotional prose. Both ideas encouraged the believer to adopt a restrained, self-effacing relationship to God, couched in all the mystery of a Pre-Raphaelite vision. The atmosphere of secrecy that shrouds much of Rossetti's poetry can be read in relation to ritualism and reserve, instructing the believer to mask herself physically and mentally before God.<sup>177</sup>

Armstrong points out that reserve endorsed a repression of feeling in Victorian poetics that was accentuated for female writers, already expected to withdraw into a private and silent sphere.<sup>178</sup> Yet Rossetti prized reserve, as she did ritualism, because her reading of each illustrated her status as a female intellectual and poet. The poet's employment and interpretation of complex doctrines demonstrated her intellectual ability, while her preferred mode of commentary, poetry, was privileged by the Oxford Movement as the most appropriate genre through which to communicate with God.<sup>179</sup> Rossetti's Tractarian affiliation thus granted her a rank often denied to women, and, as I point out in chapter four, Tractarianism offered both education and independence to women of faith.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, p.341.

<sup>177</sup> On Rossetti's 'secrecy' see Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, pp.357-359; Nadean Bishop, 'Sacred Frenzies: Repressed Eroticism in the Poetry of Christina Rossetti,' in *Reform and Counter-Reform: Dialectics of the Word in Western Christianity Since Luther*, ed. John C. Hawley (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), pp.139-152; Diane D'Amico, 'Conclusion: Secrets,' in *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender and Time* (Louisiana: Louisiana University Press, 1999), pp.173-77; Constance W. Hassett, 'Christina Rossetti and the Poetry of Reticence,' *Philological Quarterly*, 65:1 (1986), 495-514; Angela Leighton, "'When I am Dead, my Dearest': The Secret of Christina Rossetti,' *Modern Philology*, 87:4 (1990), 373-389; W. David Shaw, 'Poet of Mystery: The Art of Christina Rossetti,' in Kent, *Achievement*, pp.23-56.

<sup>178</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, p.341.

<sup>179</sup> See John Keble, 'Sacred Poetry,' *The Quarterly Review*, 32 (1825), 211-232; and John Henry Newman, 'Poetry: With Reference to Aristotle's Poetics,' *The London Review*, 1:1 (1829), 153-171, both in *Poets, Poems and Poetics in Nineteenth-Century Literary Journals*, ed. John Valdimir-Price, Foundations of Literary Theory: The Nineteenth Century in Six Volumes (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1995).

<sup>180</sup> Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (London: Virago Press, 1985); see in particular chapter two, 'Church Communities: Sisterhoods and Deaconesses' Houses,' pp.46-84; Vicinus attributes the nineteenth-century establishment of Protestant sisterhoods in Britain to Newman and Pusey, and the foundation of such religious institutions allowed educated women to be trained as nurses, teachers and moral guardians of Victorian society. While some women outgrew the regimented and often oppressive life of the sisterhood, many respected the 'emancipation of mental and

Few historians of Tractarianism in the nineteenth century note Rossetti's relevance, although John Shelton Reed's recent cultural study of Anglo-Catholicism makes several references to the poet. He argues that 'in Christina Rossetti the movement nurtured a remarkable poet,' and places her within the radical element of Tractarianism as an opponent of pew-rents, a subject I consider in chapter four.<sup>181</sup> Literary criticism, however, grants Rossetti an established position within Tractarianism.<sup>182</sup> John O. Waller's discerning article on Rossetti's reading of Dodsworth's 1848 Advent Sermons places her firmly in the context of 'one of the most distinctively High Church ecclesiastical programs in London.'<sup>183</sup> Waller argues that Rossetti's numerous Advent poems are 'the most distinguished representatives of a

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practical powers which is to be found by waking as a free person in a community of equals,' as the suffragette Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence wrote of her conventual experiences. Pethick-Lawrence also acknowledged that the late nineteenth century was 'an era of religion and faith, and at the same time of intellectual challenge,' recalling the connection between faith and intellect so prominent within Tractarian thought (pp.61, 81).

<sup>181</sup> John Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville and London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), pp.14, 138-9; he also lists 'In the Bleak Midwinter' as an enduring Anglo-Catholic hymn, p.74; Rossetti's Tractarian radicalism is also highlighted: by her work at the Highgate Penitentiary for the redemption of fallen women, see Diane D'Amico, "'Equal Before God": Christina Rossetti and the Fallen Women of Highgate Penitentiary,' in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, ed. Antony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), 67-83; by her arguably Marxist understanding of class, see Terence Holt, "'Men sell not such in any town": Exchange in "Goblin Market,"' *Victorian Poetry*, 28:1 (1990), 51-67; Elizabeth K. Helsinger, 'Consumer Power and the Utopia of Desire,' *English Literary History*, 58:4 (1991), 903-33; and by her political awareness of Britain's exploitative position in India, see Jan Marsh, 'The Indian Mutiny and Christina Rossetti's first appearance in *Once a Week*,' *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 1:1 (1992), 16-19.

<sup>182</sup> Several critics discuss Rossetti's religion without explicit reference to Tractarianism; see Theo Dombrowski, 'Dualism in the Poetry of Christina Rossetti,' *Victorian Poetry*, 14:1 (1976), 70-76; Sylvan Esh, 'Not Speaking the Unspeakable: Religion and Repetition in Christina Rossetti's Monna Innominata Sequence,' *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 34:4 (1994), 835-851; Dawn Henwood, 'Christian Allegory and Subversive Poetics: Christina Rossetti's "Prince's Progress" Re-examined,' *Victorian Poetry*, 35:1 (1997), 83-94; Tricia Lootens, *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender and Victorian Literary Canonization* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Lona Mosk Packer, 'Swinburne and Christina Rossetti: Atheist and Anglican,' *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 33:1 (1963), 30-42; Lynda Palazzo, 'The Poet and the Bible: Christina Rossetti's Feminist Hermeneutics,' *Victorian Newsletter*, 92 (1997), 6-9; Frederick S. Roden, 'The Kiss of the Soul: The Mystical Theology of Christina Rossetti's Devotional Prose,' Melnyk, *Women's Theology*, pp.37-55; Dolores Rosenblum, 'Christina Rossetti's Religious Poetry: Watching, Looking, Keeping Vigil,' *Victorian Poetry*, 20:1 (1982), 33-49; Marian Shalkhauser, 'The Female Christ,' *The Victorian Newsletter*, 10 (1956), 19-20; Sharon Smulders, "'What doth Remain": The Impetus to Devotion in the Sonnets,' in *Christina Rossetti Revisited*, ed. Herbert Sussman (New York: Northeastern University, 1996), pp.123-152; Helen H. Wenger, 'The Influence of the Bible in Christina Rossetti's Monna Innominata,' *Christian Scholar's Review*, 3 (1973), 15-24.

<sup>183</sup> Waller, 'Christ's Second Coming,' p.466.



mainly undistinguished genre,' influenced as they were by preachers like Dodsworth and Newman.<sup>184</sup> Raymond Chapman observes that Rossetti was bonded to the Oxford Movement because of its capacity to capture others like her, 'the scholars, the antiquarians, the discontented, the seekers after sensation,' as well as 'the lonely, the dissociated, the sincerely questioning.'<sup>185</sup> He astutely describes Rossetti's acquaintance with the near-Romanist W. J. E. Bennett; with Dodsworth's successor Henry William Burrows, who taught her auricular confession; and with the liberal Tractarian Richard Frederick Littledale, a figure to whom I return below.<sup>186</sup> Chapman's discussion is remarkable in its incorporation of Tractarian ideas – its privileging of women's rights, social work in the slums, elevation of celibacy and renunciation of this world for the next – as they impressed Rossetti. G. B. Tennyson even remarks that he followed Chapman's lead in 'seeing Rossetti as directly and fully a product of the Oxford Movement,' offering 'the further claim that Christina Rossetti is the true inheritor of the Tractarian devotional mode in poetry.'<sup>187</sup> While Chapman sets up a model case for Rossetti as Tractarian, he remains insistent that she was a 'poet of sacrifice and abnegation,' hostile towards her brothers' wives, distrusting of the world and constantly unwell.<sup>188</sup> Her faith, then, is ultimately compensatory for Chapman, although he makes it clear that despite her emotional and physical ailments, Rossetti remained an enlightened and intelligent reader of Tractarian teaching.

While Chapman notes, but makes little of, Rossetti's ill health, many critics ascribe a far greater relevance to her maladies than I think is necessary, creating a portrait of a melancholic, depressed and so tortured poet. Rossetti suffered from many afflictions, including a thyroid condition, Graves Disease and cancer, enduring a painful mastectomy before she died in 1894. Yet it is the relatively minor 'breakdown' she

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<sup>184</sup> *ibid*, p.467.

<sup>185</sup> Chapman, *Faith and Revolt*, pp.171-172.

<sup>186</sup> *ibid*, pp.173-174.

<sup>187</sup> G. B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), p.198; see Tennyson's 'Postscript: Christina Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins,' pp.197-211; see also Tennyson, 'Afterword: Love God and Die – Christina Rossetti and the Future,' in Kent, *Achievement*, pp.246-255.

suffered in 1845 that most critics converge upon as a condition which supposedly transformed Rossetti from a vivacious and quick-tempered little girl to an inward and anxious young woman. As I argue in chapter four, this nervous breakdown was likely to have been a form of religious mania, as her doctor, Charles Hare, concluded, a suggestion biographers and critics alike deprecate. Not housebound, abused, heartbroken or anorexic, Rossetti, I think, was obsessively religious like many young Victorian middle-class women, dour and melancholic as only the best Puseyites were.<sup>189</sup> When Rossetti's mania subsided, she matured into a deeply contemplative and intellectual Christian, developing happy relationships with both friends and family. A reflective moment between Rossetti and her niece, Helen, betrays her own opinion of her 'breakdown,' in which she laughs away an admittedly violent incident often positioned as evidence for her psychosis. Rossetti recalls that she witnessed Helen in a particularly bad temper, and attempted to comfort her with the confession: 'You must not imagine that your Aunt was always the calm and sedate person you now behold. I, too, had a very passionate temper [and] on one occasion, being rebuked by my dear Mother for some fault, I seized upon a pair of scissors, and ripped up my arm to vent my wrath.'<sup>190</sup> There is no suggestion that William's daughter was an abused and agonised lunatic, however. As Harrison recognizes in her epistolary output, Rossetti was a generally cheerful Christian, suited to Virginia Woolf's description of her as an intelligent, thinking poet, 'ribald and witty.'<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Chapman, *Faith and Revolt*, pp.181, 183, 187.

<sup>189</sup> Jones suggests Rossetti manipulated her illness to avoid taking a position as a governess, *Christina Rossetti*, pp.18, 21; Marsh notoriously contends Rossetti was sexually abused by her father, in *Christina Rossetti*, p.260; Packer fabricates a doomed romance between the poet and William Bell Scott, in *Christina Rossetti*; see also Paula Marantz Cohen, 'Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market": A Paradigm for Anorexia Nervosa,' *University of Hartford Studies in Literature*, 17:1 (1985), 1-18; James A. Kohl, 'A Medical Comment on Christina Rossetti,' *Notes and Queries*, 15:213:11 (1968), 423-424; Anna Krugovoy Silver, "'My Perpetual Fast': The Renunciation of Appetite in Christina Rossetti's *Speaking Likenesses*," *Victorians Institute Journal*, 25 (1997), 177-201; Deborah Anne Thompson, 'Anorexia as Lived Trope: Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market,"' *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 24:3-4 (1991), 89-105.

<sup>190</sup> Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.50.

<sup>191</sup> See Antony H. Harrison, 'Epistolary Relations: The Correspondence of Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti,' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 4 (1995), 91-101 (p.95); see also Harrison's edition of *The Letters of Christina Rossetti*, 4 vols (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of

Woolf ultimately rendered Rossetti as a believer who 'died in terror' of a wrathful God, however, a suggestion many critics follow by recounting her final days as full of doubt, self-loathing and fear.<sup>192</sup> David A. Kent's 'Christina Rossetti's Dying' fully addresses this issue, contending that her religion is misleadingly 'simplified and presented as the anaesthetic that failed.'<sup>193</sup> Her poetry is certainly preoccupied with the theme of death and her last hours were full of pain and depression, but this was not necessarily because she was 'uncertain of salvation,' as Woolf suggests, for no reserved Tractarian could assume absolution.<sup>194</sup> Rossetti's approach to salvation was far more complex. As Linda E. Marshall points out, the poet subscribed to the doctrine of 'soul-sleep,' the 'idea that the soul is suspended in profound unconsciousness from death until doomsday.'<sup>195</sup> For Rossetti, the soul was locked within Hades between death and judgement, a realm she interpreted like 'the Fathers and Anglo-Catholic commentators,' that is, like an intellectual. A thoughtful Christian, then, rather than an impulsive believer switching between faith and doubt, Rossetti was too invested in the Christian Paradise post-dating death to reject all at the last.

Marshall too, however, detracts from Rossetti's intellectualism, proposing that while Rossetti's projections of Paradise accord with Newman's, she 'had scant interest in or knowledge of the prophecies' surrounding the Apocalypse.<sup>196</sup> Strangely, Marshall documents this suggestion with reference to Rossetti's elaborate commentary on the Apocalypse, *The Face of the Deep*, noting that the author claimed 'the whole subject is beyond me' (*FD*, p.342). Yet Rossetti's apology here is followed by her confession that

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Virginia, 1997-); Virginia Woolf, '4 August 1918,' *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), I, pp.178-9, in Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose* (London: Everyman, 1994), pp.465-466.

<sup>192</sup> Woolf, *Diary*, p.466.

<sup>193</sup> David A. Kent, 'Christina Rossetti's Dying,' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 5 (1996), 83-97 (p.94); see also Kent, 'Sequence and Meaning in Christina Rossetti's *Verses* (1893),' *Victorian Poetry*, 17:3 (1979), 259-264.

<sup>194</sup> Woolf, *Diary*, p.466.

<sup>195</sup> Linda E. Marshall, 'What the Dead Are Doing Underground: Hades and Heaven in the Writings of Christina Rossetti,' *Victorian Newsletter*, Fall (1987), 55-60 (p.55); Marshall re-historicizes Jerome McGann's thesis that Rossetti's understanding of soul sleep was linked to premillenarianism, accommodating it instead within 'Anglican eschatology.'

<sup>196</sup> *ibid*, p. 58.



‘the prophecies leave me in anxious ignorance’ in precisely the manner the Tractarian thought they should, reserved away from the believer until the last day (p.342). As I argue elsewhere, Rossetti had a firm sense of the Apocalypse, controversially agreeing with Newman that its messenger, the Antichrist, should be associated with a generalized principle of evil rather than the Roman Catholic Church as many Victorian Anglicans contended.<sup>197</sup> While Rossetti, I think, considered herself intellectually equal to Newman’s work, she found John Keble’s poetry a more pastoral influence. Diane D’Amico addresses Keble’s hold over the poet in her article on his popular volume *The Christian Year* (1827), an 1837 copy of which Rossetti read and marked with crosses next to certain poems as well as illustrations conveying their messages.<sup>198</sup> D’Amico also observes that the sixty-three lines underscored in the volume mostly converge on the subject of the ‘weary heart,’ a symbol that reflected Rossetti’s own endless yearning for God.<sup>199</sup> Her copy of *The Christian Year* does not simply reveal her emotional affinity with Keble, however. Rossetti slightly amended Keble’s poem ‘Gunpowder Treason’ to accord with Roman Catholic doctrine, D’Amico remarks, portraying Rossetti as a thinking believer conscious of the Tractarian doctrines and poetics to which she aspired.<sup>200</sup>

Rossetti is fashioned similarly by both P. G. Stanwood, in an article on her devotional prose, and Linda Schofield, who reads the devotional poetry in terms of Tractarian poetics.<sup>201</sup> While Stanwood notes the array of intellectual disciplines which

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<sup>197</sup> I argue this more fully in ‘Defending Rome: J. H. Newman, Christina Rossetti and the Antichrist,’ paper presented at ‘Romantic Revelations,’ *British Association for Romantic Studies* (1999); see also Robert M. Kachur, ‘Envisioning Equality, Asserting Authority,’ in Melnyk, *Women’s Theology*, pp.3-36.

<sup>198</sup> Diane D’Amico, ‘Christina Rossetti’s *Christian Year*: Comfort for “the weary heart,”’ *Victorian Newsletter*, Fall (1987), 36-42 (p.36).

<sup>199</sup> *ibid*, p.39.

<sup>200</sup> *ibid*, p.41.

<sup>201</sup> P. G. Stanwood, ‘Christina Rossetti’s Devotional Prose,’ in Kent, *Achievement*, pp.231-247; on Rossetti’s prose, see also Pamela K. Gilbert, ‘“A Horrid Game”: Woman as Social Entity in Christina Rossetti’s Prose,’ *English: The Journal of the English Association*, 41:169 (1992), 1-23; Colleen Hobbs, ‘A View from “The Lowest Place”: Christina Rossetti’s Devotional Prose,’ *Victorian Poetry*, 32:3-4 (1994), 409-428; Wendy Katz, ‘Muse from Nowhere: Christina Rossetti’s Fantasy World in *Speaking Likenesses*,’ *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 5:1 (1984), 14-35; Mark Samuels Lasner, ‘Christina Rossetti’s “Common Looking Booklet,”’ *Notes and Queries*, 28:226:5 (1981), 420-421; Lynda Palazzo, ‘Christina Rossetti: Two Forgotten Sketches,’ *Notes and Queries*, 37:235:1 (1990), 38-39; Christopher

Rossetti engaged with, including science as well as theology, he nevertheless claims that her writing only ever offers a 'rare glimpse of her intellectual leanings.'<sup>202</sup> So too does Schofield suggest that while many 'Tractarian poems are about learning,' Rossetti's are about 'being,' undermining, perhaps, her interest in education for all, particularly women.<sup>203</sup> I discuss Rossetti's interest in education for women in chapter four, relating her views to those expressed by Richard Frederick Littledale in *The Religious Education of Women* (1873). Littledale is a Tractarian little associated with Rossetti by critics, although David A. Kent and P. G. Stanwood insist that she 'undoubtedly would have read and been affected by [Littledale's] essays.'<sup>204</sup> Marsh notes that Littledale, a firm Tractarian ritualist, was Rossetti's confessor and priest, administering the sacrament to her when she was unwell.<sup>205</sup> Chaplain to the East Grinstead Anglican Sisterhood, attacked for its 'Papal' spirit in controversies I discuss in chapter four, Littledale was a forceful commentator on women's rights, encouraging Rossetti to write *Annus Domini*, as well as a poem for trainee Sisters.<sup>206</sup> While critics often relate Rossetti to other religious and literary figures, Littledale is rarely mentioned: he is more commonly mentioned by biographers.<sup>207</sup> Antony H. Harrison's study of Rossetti's Victorian

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Ricks, 'Christina Rossetti and Commonplace Books,' *Grand Street*, 9:3 (1990), 190-198; Linda Schofield, 'Being and Understanding: Devotional Poetry of Christina Rossetti and the Tractarians,' in Kent, *Achievement*, pp.301-321; Silver, "'My Perpetual Fast'"; Joel Westerholm, "'I Magnify Mine Office': Christina Rossetti's Authoritative Voice in her Devotional Prose,' *The Victorian Newsletter*, 84 (1993), 11-17.

<sup>202</sup> Stanwood, 'Devotional Prose,' p.234.

<sup>203</sup> Schofield, 'Being and Understanding,' p.321; notably, Schofield mentions Isaac Williams as an influence on Rossetti, p.301fn1.

<sup>204</sup> David A. Kent and P. G. Stanwood, *Selected Prose of Christina Rossetti* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p.377fn.24.

<sup>205</sup> Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.416; Jan Marsh's biography is exceptional in its assimilation of the poet's Tractarian environment and sympathies, although the nature of its genre prevents extended analysis of Rossetti's poetical presentation of theological doctrines. Rossetti's other biographers comment less thoroughly on her Tractarian background, but endeavour to portray her as intensely devotional; see Georgina Battiscombe, *Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life* (London: Constable, 1981); MacKenzie Bell, *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study* (New York: Haskell House, 1898); Ralph Bellas, *Christina Rossetti* (Boston: Twayne, 1977); Jones, *Learning not to be First*; Lona Mosk Packer, *Christina Rossetti* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Frances Thomas, *Christina Rossetti: A Biography* (London: Virago, 1994).

<sup>206</sup> 'The Master is Come, and Callest for Thee,' in Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.417.

<sup>207</sup> In addition to Marsh, Mackenzie Bell discusses Littledale in some detail, in *Christina Rossetti*, pp.49, 50, 86, 113, 149; Shelton Reed also notes Rossetti's friendship with Littledale, *Glorious Battle*, p.57; for examples of articles linking Rossetti to other figures, see Mary Arseneau and D. M. R. Bentley, 'Peter

context makes no mention of Littledale, although it yields valuable comparisons with Tractarians like Keble, Newman and Williams, aesthetes such as Walter Pater and Swinburne, and other writers, notably Dante and Petrarch.<sup>208</sup> Harrison's intricate exposition of Rossetti's intellectual interests, along with his recent edition of her letters, are pivotal to the arguments made here, which I hope illuminate further much of what Harrison implies.<sup>209</sup>

Harrison's references to Isaac Williams, for example, do not explicitly extend to his Tracts on reserve that provide the focal point in chapter five's discussion of reserve. Few critics attend to Rossetti's reading of the *Tracts for the Times*, although many allude to their subject matter as Mary Arseneau and Margaret Johnson do in relation to the doctrine of reserve. Arseneau registers Rossetti's reserve within her abstruse exploration of 'spiritual messages in the natural world' through her poetry, mentioning William's Tracts on the subject only in a footnote.<sup>210</sup> Her article is more concerned with 'Goblin Market' as a Tractarian metaphor of the believer who searches beyond the

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Parley and the Rossettis,' *English Language Notes*, 31:1 (1993), 56-60; Jerome Bump, 'Hopkins, Christina Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelitism,' *The Victorian Newsletter*, 57 (1980), 1-6, and 'Hopkins, Metalepsis, and the Metaphysicals,' *John Donne Journal*, 4:2 (1985), 304-339; Warren Herendeen, 'Andrew Marvell and Christina Rossetti,' *Seventeenth-Century News*, 30 (1972), 8-9, and 'The Midsummer Eves of Shakespeare and Christina Rossetti,' *The Victorian Newsletter*, 41 (1972), 24-26; Cora Kaplan, 'The Indefinite Disclosed: Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson,' *Women Writing and Writing About Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (London: Croom Helm 1979), pp.61-75; Sharon Leder, *The Language of Exclusion: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti* (New York and London: Greenwood, 1987); Elaine Shefer, 'The Woman at the Window in Victorian Art and Christina Rossetti as the Subject of Millais' "Mariana,"' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 4:1 (1983), 14-25; Grover Smith, 'Ford Madox Ford and the Christina Rossetti Influence,' *English Literature in Transition*, 29:3 (1986), 287-296; Sharon Smulders, '"A Form that Differences": Vocational Metaphors in the Poetry of Christina Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins,' *Victorian Poetry*, 29:2 (1994), 161-173; June Sturrock, 'Protective Pastoral: Innocence and Female Experience in William Blake's *Songs* and Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market,"' *The Colby Quarterly*, 30:2 (1994), 98-108.

<sup>208</sup> See Harrison, *Rossetti in Context*.

<sup>209</sup> Harrison's other works on Rossetti and Victorian poetry include, 'Christina Rossetti and the Sage Discourse of Feminist High Anglicanism,' *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, ed. Thais E. Morgan (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp.87-104; *Christina Rossetti in Context* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1988); ed. with Beverly Taylor, *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992); 'Epistolary Relations: The Correspondence of Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti,' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 4 (1995), 91-101; 'In the Shadow of E. B. B.: Christina Rossetti and Ideological Estrangement,' in *Victorian Poets and Romantic Poems: Intertextuality and Ideology*, ed. Antony H. Harrison (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1990); ed., *The Letters of Christina Rossetti*, 4 vols (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1997-); *Victorian Poets and the Politics of Culture: Discourse and Ideology* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1998).



material for moral and spiritual enlightenment.<sup>211</sup> Reading a supposedly non-devotional poem through Tractarian doctrines, notably incarnationism and sacramentalism (ideas Diane Apostolos-Cappadona also stresses in relation to Rossetti), Arseneau proposes that Rossetti's secular poetry yields as much religious meaning as does her devotional verse.<sup>212</sup> Margaret Johnson too cites Rossetti's fascination with reserve, positioning her 'mixture of medieval asceticism and sensuousness, linked to a Tractarian aesthetic' as a model for Gerard Manley Hopkins.<sup>213</sup> Johnson contends, as I do, that Rossetti's poetry is 'simple and conformable' on the surface only, presenting a veiling of meaning 'so heavy that it can barely be seen through at all.'<sup>214</sup> No detailed discussion of reserve is offered, however, and Johnson turns instead to Rossetti's representation of gender, comparing her treatment of Marian devotion to that of Hopkins'.<sup>215</sup>

Johnson ultimately finds Rossetti guilty of portraying women unkindly in her poetry, a suggestion many critics uphold. Rossetti's refusal to sign Emily Davies' petition for a women's college at Cambridge, for example, is often positioned as an

<sup>210</sup> Arseneau, 'Incarnation and Interpretation,' p.92fn5.

<sup>211</sup> Arseneau, 'Incarnation and Interpretation'; I have chosen not to discuss "Goblin Market" in this thesis, conceding Arseneau's Tractarian reading; there is a wealth of material on the poem, however; see, for example, Alan P. Barr, 'Sensuality Survived: Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market,"' *English Miscellany: A Symposium of History, Literature and the Arts*, 28-29 (1979-1980), 267-282; Mary Wilson Carpenter, 'Eat me, drink me, love me': The Consumable Female Body in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," *Victorian Poetry*, 29:4 (1991), 415-434; Janet Galligani Casey, 'The Potential of Sisterhood: Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market,"' *Victorian Poetry*, 29:1, (1991), 63-78; Steven Connor, 'Speaking Likenesses': Language and Repetition in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," *Victorian Poetry*, 22:4 (1984), 439-448; Robert B. Drake, 'Rossetti's "Goblin Market,"' *The Explicator*, 51:1 (1992), 22-24; Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, 'The Representation of Violence/The Violence of Representation: Housman's Illustrations to Rossetti's "Goblin Market,"' *English Studies in Canada*, 19:3 (1993), 305-328; Linda E. Marshall, 'Transfigured to His Likeness': Sensible Transcendentalism in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 63:3 (1994), 429-50; Dorothy Mermin, 'Heroic Sisterhood in "Goblin Market,"' *Victorian Poetry*, 21:2 (1983), 107-118; Helena Michie, '"There is No Friend like a Sister": Sisterhood as Sexual Difference,' *English Literary History*, 56:1 (1989), 401-421; Sylvia Bailey Shurbutt, 'Revisionist Myth Making and Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market": Eve's Apple and Other Questions Revised and Considered,' *The Victorian Newsletter*, 82 (1992), 40-44; Martine Watson-Brownley, 'Love and Sensuality in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market,"' *Essays in Literature*, 6 (1979), 179-186.

<sup>212</sup> Arseneau, 'Incarnation and Interpretation,' pp.80, 90; see Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, 'Oxford and the Pre-Raphaelites from the Perspective of Nature and Symbol,' *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 2:1 (1981), 90-110.

<sup>213</sup> Margaret Johnson, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and Tractarian Poetry* (Aldershot and Vermont: Ashgate, 1997), pp.95, 107.

<sup>214</sup> *ibid*, p.106.

indication of her anti-feminist stance, rather than the more likely reason that she opposed Cambridge's anti-Catholic policy. Rossetti's opinions on the woman question are widely debated, and critics consider her variously complicit with and subversive of Victorian patriarchal society.<sup>216</sup> What I convey here is Rossetti's acquisition of an independent role as a Christian via her Tractarian faith. In chapter four I elucidate the middle-class female believer's autonomy within the Tractarian Church environment, free from the policing control of husbands, fathers and brothers. While the priest substituted for such male figures, his mysterious and semi-Roman guise distanced him from the English patriarch threatened by the priest's challenge to the Victorian family unit. Offering his laity theological as well as spiritual guidance, the priest occupied a kind of tutor role, educating women excluded from other scholarly environments. Not

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<sup>215</sup> On Rossetti's understanding of Mary, see Diane D'Amico, 'Eve, Mary, and Mary Magdalene: Christina Rossetti's Feminine Triptych,' in Kent, *Achievement*, pp.175-191.

<sup>216</sup> See, for example, Isobel Armstrong, 'Christina Rossetti: Diary of a Feminist Reading,' *Women Reading Women's Writing*, ed. Sue Rose (Sussex: Harvester, 1987), pp.117-137; Catherine Belsey and Andrew Belsey, 'Christina Rossetti: Sister to the Brotherhood,' *Textual Practice*, 2:1 (1988), 30-50; Joseph Bristow, "'No Friend Like a Sister': Christina Rossetti's Female Kin," *Victorian Poetry*, 33:2 (1995), 257-281; Diane D'Amico, 'Christina Rossetti and *The English Woman's Journal*,' *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 3:1 (1994), 20-23, 'Fair Margaret of "Maiden-Song": Rossetti's Response to the Romantic Nightingale,' *The Victorian Newsletter*, 80 (1991), 8-13 and 'Rossetti's Eve and the Woman Question,' in *Faith, Gender, and Time*, pp.118-146; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp.549-554; J. Anne George and Susie Campbell, 'The Role of Embroidery in Victorian Culture and the Pre-Raphaelite Circle,' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 7:2 (1987), 55-67; Angela Leighton, "'Because men made the laws": The Fallen Woman and the Women Poet,' *Victorian Poetry*, 27:2 (1989), 109-127; Krista Lysack, 'The Economics of Ecstasy in Christina Rossetti's Monna Innominata,' *Victorian Poetry*, 36:4 (1998), 399-416; Helena Michie, 'The Battle for Sisterhood: Christina Rossetti's Strategies for Control in her Sister Poems' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 3:2 (1983), 38-55; David D. Nolta, 'Whispering Likenesses: Images of Christina Rossetti 1847-1853,' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Studies*, 2:1 (1989), 49-55; Marian Owen, 'Christina Rossetti: "Affairs of the Heart,"' *Humanities Association Bulletin*, 21:3 (1970), 16-25; Dolores Rosenblum, 'Christina Rossetti: The Inward Pose,' *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*, ed. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (London: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 82-98; John Schad, "'The Lowest Room": Christina Rossetti Through Irigaray's *Speculum*,' *Victorians in Theory: From Derrida to Browning* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp.6-41; Virginia Sickbert, 'Christina Rossetti and Victorian Children's Poetry: A Maternal Challenge to the Patriarchal Family,' *Victorian Poetry*, 31:4 (1993), 385-410; Sharon Smulders, 'Christina Rossetti and Female Enfranchisement,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 34:4 (1992), 568-588; Terry L. Spaise, 'Not "as she fulfils His Dreams" but "As She Is": The Feminist Voice of Christina Rossetti,' *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 51:1 (1997), 53-68; Anna Maria Stuby, 'Watching Man Watching Woman: Christina Rossetti's "Reflection,"' *Anglistik and Englischunterricht*, 53 (1994), 21-31; Winston Weathers, 'Christina Rossetti: The Sisterhood of Self,' *Victorian Poetry*, 3:1 (1965), 81-89; for a recent overview of the 'Woman Question,' see Nicola Diane Thompson, ed., *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

all Tractarians encountered a pedagogic community at Church, although Rossetti and her sister Maria did: since they attended Christ Church, the epicentre of the Tractarian movement, they were introduced to the writings of the Fathers and the *Tracts for the Times*. This alone does not endow Rossetti with an intellectual status, but it is clear that she reaches profound levels of theological thought within her poetry and devotional prose.

Both Brontë and Rossetti, then, may be described as intellectual because of their responses to religious issues, one attempting to break away from religious culture, the other striving to work within it. Brontë, a critic of the Methodist culture she is confined within, I argue, performed a role as a thinker close to Said's 'amateur intellectual': questioning values central to her society, and serving to execute, and thus transform, the task of religious critique through poetry. More subversive of orthodox religion than Rossetti, Brontë manipulated Low Church religious language to dismantle a Christian belief-system she felt at once imprisoned by and exiled from. Her intellectual status thus emerged from her desire to denounce religion, not blindly, but by assimilating information about its doctrines and beliefs in order to reveal their vacuity. As I will contend, however, Brontë's attempt to undermine Christianity through religious language backfires, her increased sense of confinement within its rhetoric reflected in poems which are dense and contradictory.

Rossetti's intellectual ability is also apparent from her writing, laden with references to ecclesiological subjects, like ceremony and ritual, and Tractarian doctrines such as reserve. I suggest here that her devotional poetry, especially in *Verses* (1893), is more successful than Brontë's, however, expressive of an authentic religious experience markedly Tractarian in its aesthetic and Catholic presentation. Revealing Rossetti's specific religious affiliation, then, the poetry enables the reader to translate its reticent tone through the doctrine of reserve, and thus decode the poet's hidden expositions of scripture and liturgy. Her identity as a thinker, then, conforms in part with Coleridge's

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cleric, a teacher of biblical law and spiritual values, guardian of moral society and theological scholar whose professional affiliation lies with her Christian readers. Her intellectual work involves both the promotion of Tractarian beliefs and the advocacy of a thoughtful relationship with dogma and God alike. Rossetti's poetry thus encouraged believers, male and female, to think about their faith, an exercise that enabled them to understand God's secrets in heaven, and also sustain religious debate in an increasingly secular age.

## Brontë's Response to Methodism and Religious Enthusiasm

This chapter takes as its main concern the idea of religious enthusiasm, an intense feeling Brontë became familiar with, I argue, through her encounter with Methodism. From one perspective, this chapter may be viewed as a companion piece to chapter three. While I detail and discuss enthusiasm as a religious and cultural notion here, in chapter three I will convey how Brontë employed it within her poetry as an aspect of the sublime. In Part I of this chapter, 'Methodism,' I investigate the Methodist environment in which Brontë lived, outlining the Methodist heritage by which Haworth was embraced. I discuss Patrick Brontë's predecessor in the parish, William Grimshaw, a close friend of John and Charles Wesley who are regarded as the founders of Methodism. I also emphasize the aspect of Methodism as a religion which welcomed women as intellectual and spiritual counterparts to male believers, thus encouraging the young Brontë to read religious hymns, sermons and pamphlets freely, literature she had access to through her father. Through her encounter with this Methodist literature, Brontë, I argue, was drawn to the idea of religious enthusiasm as a mode of expression able to convey an intense passion barred to nineteenth-century women writers. Although repelled by what she deemed a tyrannical and unjust Christian belief-system, Brontë found enthusiasm to be a vibrant, uplifting and so potentially liberating sensation. Thus the poet deemed enthusiasm a passionate release from the staid religious environment she felt enclosed within. Although enthusiasm ultimately did not free her from such entrapment, an argument I advance in chapter three, the manner in which she processed and then employed such religious fervour demonstrates her intellectual ability.

Part II, 'Enthusiasm,' examines enthusiasm as an idea to which the poet was attracted, detailing the different genres through which she experienced its force. I argue

that Brontë learned about enthusiasm through the hymn form, poetry and sermons, as well as through the intense public debate over enthusiasm as a dangerous and threatening force. Questioned by figures such as the third Earl of Shaftesbury, Voltaire, David Hume, George Lavington and John Wesley, enthusiasm became an increasingly loaded term, signifying mania and subversion. Understood in some quarters as irrationality, then, as well as religious feeling, enthusiasm was also connected to the developing discourse of madness and thus deemed a disease from which the subject could not recover. This latter debate, I suggest, particularly captivated Brontë, drawn to enthusiasm's capacity to disrupt orthodox religion. Employing enthusiasm as indicative of an intense feeling able to break away from religion, Brontë, I argue, underestimated its power to overwhelm her own writing. While she is able to view enthusiasm as madness, an understanding enhanced by her familiarity with clinical conceptions of insanity granted by the local York Retreat, Brontë cannot help but render it as a primarily religious concept. Chapter three discusses Brontë's defeated attempt to employ religious enthusiasm as a tool to dismantle religious orthodoxy, an attempt which nevertheless remains successful in its invocation of intense passion. Here, however, I establish that the poet could not have conceived of enthusiasm in a manner outside the limits of religion and specifically, the Methodist environment in which she lived and never escaped from.

I begin with Brontë's 'A sudden chasm of ghastly light' (1837) as a poem which stages the relationship between religion, enthusiasm and madness, one which produced the particularity of Brontë's poetical voice. The poem charts the experience of a narrator who has been stranded in the aftermath of a Gondal battle, disturbed and so susceptible to the religious power by which she is finally overwhelmed. Musing on the horrors of war, 'all the Battles madness,' she lies suspended in despair within a Hall that stands, now ruined, in the grounds of an immense cathedral (l.9). Remembering the 'yells' and 'groans' of the soldiers, half mad with 'death and danger,' she renders the survivors still



delirious and warped by a 'frenzied gladness' amidst a murderous scene (ll.11-12). The dead, the narrator notes, are 'piled' in 'plundered churches,' now 'roofless' and 'splashed with blood,' thus connecting the madness inherent to war with religion (ll.13, 16). Like zealous believers, the soldiers are coerced into fighting for a power that leaves them without recourse, homeless and bereft of sanity. Surrounded by such despondency, the narrator is unable to sleep in the Hall, her heart 'burned and bounded' by what she has encountered in war, and the 'inward tempest' she feels within unalleviated by the ominous calm outside (ll.18-20).

As a 'full flood of despair' returns to her 'breast again,' the narrator becomes uneasy, turning to the scene beyond the Hall's windows which look out on the 'minster-yard' (ll.23-24, 26). It is as if the cathedral that stands in these grounds wills the already melancholic narrator into a frenzy, seducing her into confronting its greatness and thus feeling an enthusiastic union with God. For from the 'minster-yard' comes 'a wandering moan | A sound unutterably drear,' emanating from the cathedral and causing her to 'shrink to be alone' (ll.30-32). She is lured from the Hall further by the 'ghostly fingers' of a lone 'black yew tree' that stands amidst the cathedral's grave yard, drearily rattling against the rail of an old vault and evoking haunting sounds from the tombs (ll.33, 35-36). At this, she screams, 'O God what caused that shuddering thrill? | That anguished agonized start?' provoking intense emotion within her that initiates an enthusiastic experience. Such enthusiasm is signified here as 'An undefined an awful dream,' a kind of 'memory' that speeds through her mind, upsetting and subverting its balance (ll.41, 43). The only memories Brontë's readers know the narrator has are those despairing thoughts of the war, provoking us to again link religion with the insanity of conflict. The narrator declares that, from these recollections, a 'frightful feeling frenzy born' overwhelms her, and she is compelled to run 'down the dark oak stair' of the Hall, open its doors, and confront the bewitching heights of the cathedral:

I pondered not I drew the bar

An icy glory leapt on high  
 From that wide heaven were every star  
 glowed like a dying memory

And there the great cathedral rose  
 Discrowned but most majestic so  
 It looked down in serene repose  
 On its own realm of buried woe (ll.49-56).

The cathedral, terrifying and yet tranquil, invites the frenzied narrator to perceive its majesty and its peace, evoking a spectrum of emotion like religion itself and sustaining her enthusiastic feeling. Looking ‘down in serene repose’ on the narrator, the cathedral seems ominously innocent of the charge of invoking enthusiasm (l.55). The poem reveals, however, that Brontë felt even the depression and horror of war unequal to the extreme passion religion excites. I will explore here the terms through which she communicates the intense feeling the narrator is struck down by, that of enthusiasm, and relate it to the ‘peculiar music – wild, melancholy, and elevating’ Charlotte Brontë identified within Emily’s poetry.<sup>1</sup> For Charlotte, her sister’s verse ‘seized’ her with a ‘deep conviction that these were not common effusions, nor at all like the poetry women generally write. I thought them condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine.’<sup>2</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Brontë, ‘Biographical Notice’ [1850], in Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* [1847] ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 1995), pp.xxvi-xxxvii (p.xxvii).

<sup>2</sup> The story of Charlotte’s discovery of her sister’s poetry is well-known, stumbled upon within two notebooks hidden within Emily’s usually locked desk. Brontë began to write poetry before beginning school at Cowan Bridge in 1824, just after Patrick had presented Branwell with a box of toy soldiers. Charlotte recalls how she and Emily ‘jumped out of bed’ and grabbed a soldier each, Emily naming hers ‘Gravey’ as he was a ‘Grave looking fellow.’ From this point on, the Brontë children were all flung into a fantasy world of story-telling revolving around the soldiers, writing theatrical little pieces reminiscent of Scott, Hoffman and other Gothic Romantics. Brontë remained interested in adventurous fables throughout her life, displaying an enthusiastic and turbulent spirit against Anne’s more balanced patience, and her Gondal poems attest to this, strewn with tales of rebellion, revolution, murder and betrayal. Edward Chitham suggests that Brontë wrote the Gondal poems in her own persona and then found a Gondal character to whom they might apply, yet the stories this narrative weaves are complex and incomplete, making Gondal criticism a difficult and often hypothetical endeavour, Edward Chitham, *A Life of Emily*

vigour, I argue, can be traced to the Protestant Revival, and more specifically to Methodism, founded by John Wesley in the 1720s.<sup>3</sup> I contend that Brontë's response to her religious environment was predominantly intellectual, communicated within complex poems that both reinforce, subvert and comment on Methodist doctrine and ideology.

Many of Brontë's critics, from contemporary reviews of her work as masculine and fierce, to Caroline Spurgeon, Jacques Blondel and Jonathan Wordsworth with their interest in her assumed mysticism, have undercut an intellectual ability the poet actively promoted.<sup>4</sup> As I suggest, Brontë was consciously aware of the manner in which Methodist ideology coloured the way she poetically interpreted her society and culture. Like Matthew Arnold, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Tennyson, for example, Brontë struggled against the control religion exerted over her thought. I suggest, however, that she found solace in the divinely inspired notion of enthusiasm as an idea that warranted ardour of feeling and excess of thought. Brontë cannot be identified as a Christian writer

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*Brontë* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp.53, 56, 125; while I respect the intricate and fascinating debate surrounding questions of Gondal's narrative, this chapter is engaged otherwise with the poems' religious and intellectual frame and the readings I offer rely partly upon Fannie E. Ratchford's descriptions of its characters and events while recognising the problems inherent to her retelling of the plot, see *Gondal's Queen: A Novel in Verse by Emily Jane Brontë* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955).

<sup>3</sup> Methodism evolved as a huge independent denomination; 'Evangelicalism,' a term implying the revival of gospel-based religion within Protestantism, is usually confined to a movement influenced by Methodism, but remaining within the Church of England (where it helped stimulate, as a reaction, the High Church 'Tractarian' or 'Oxford' movement). To this latter movement Patrick Brontë belonged. Technically a curate within the Anglican parish of Bradford, his ecclesiastical appointment depended on a board of trustees composed of the owners of certain parcels of land, some of whom, in his day, were actually dissenters. At this time also, many Methodists remained technically Anglicans and occasional Church attendees. 'Methodists' proper were followers of the Wesleys, and became defined as a religious denomination in schism from the Church of England. They were particularly strong in West Yorkshire. They divided into two main groups: Wesleyan Methodists who remained closest to the Church of England; and Calvinistic Methodists, the followers of George Whitefield, who tended to be fundamentalist and working class.

<sup>4</sup> E. P. Whipple, for example, condemned Brontë in 1848 as a 'spendthrift[ ] of malice and profanity' who 'overdoes the business' in her literary creations, in 'Novels of the Season,' *The North American Review*, 67:141 (1848), pp.354-69, in 'Emily Jane Brontë,' *Nineteenth-Century Criticism*, ed. Cherie D. Abbey and Janet Mullane (Michigan: Gale Research Company, 1987), XVI, pp.61-128 (p.63); see also Caroline F. Spurgeon, *Mysticism in English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913); Jacques Blondel, 'Emily Brontë: Expérience Spirituelle et Création Poétique' (1955), in *Emily Brontë*, ed. Jean-Pierre Petit, Penguin Critical Anthologies (Middlesex: Penguin Education, 1973), pp.135-150; Jonathan Wordsworth, 'Wordsworth and the Poetry of Emily Brontë,' *Brontë Society Transactions*, 18 (1972), 85-100.



in the sense that Rossetti is, yet neither can she be understood as a heretic misanthropist opposed to the Christian values that overwhelmed nineteenth-century culture, as critics like Stevie Davies assert.<sup>5</sup> She is an observant explicator of this culture, I argue, and her poetical manipulation of enthusiasm is recognizable where her religious belief is not. As Charlotte recalled: 'One time I mentioned that someone had asked me what religion I was (with a view to getting me for a partisan), and that I had said that was between God and me. Emily (who was lying on the hearthrug) exclaimed, "That's right." This was all I ever heard Emily say on religious subjects.'<sup>6</sup>

Conventionally, Brontë's poem, 'No coward soul is mine' (1846), is recognized as the foremost expression of her religious belief. The narrator positions God within her breast in the poem, an everlasting force that imbues her with 'Undying Life' (l.8). Able to draw from the power of a deity within, the doctrines and ideas of an organized religion seem vain and trivial by comparison:

Vain are the thousand creeds  
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,  
Worthless as withered weeds  
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main (ll.9-12).

Refusing to cower behind the countless doctrines organized religion spawns, the narrator bravely faces the 'world's storm troubled sphere' and 'Heaven's glories' (ll.2-3). She trusts completely in the personal deity presented here, one able to control the events of the world as an energy that 'may never be destroyed' (l.28). She thus loses her fear of death in line with the stoicism of Epictetus as Margaret Maison contends, a philosopher

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<sup>5</sup> See Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë*, Key Women Writers (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988); *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (London: The Women's Press, 1994); *Emily Brontë*, Writers and their Work (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas John Winnifrith, 'Brontë's Religion,' in *Critical Essays on Emily Brontë*, ed. Thomas John Winnifrith (New York: G. K. Hall, 1997), pp.8-18 (p.8).

who argued that 'God himself is within you' as Brontë suggests here.<sup>7</sup> Only the conventional rules of organized religion 'waken doubt' in the narrator, and she betrays an intimacy with a God outside the confines of Christianity, suggesting she owns a privileged affinity with this power (l.13).

However, such power did not, I suggest, simply come from within Brontë, but grew from her familiarity with the Methodist doctrine of enthusiasm. Few of Brontë's poems position such a direct attack on 'vain' religious creeds as the above poem does, but many deal with a fervent feeling that appears to release the narrator from some kind of imprisonment (interpreted as the very metaphor of orthodox religion in chapter three) but which in fact keeps her within a religious frame. Repelled by the Methodist's Christian deity, an often cruel and dictatorial being, the religious language of enthusiasm proved too embracing, offering a way of expressing the intense passion with which Brontë is associated. While her poetry often seems condemnatory of orthodox belief, its tenets form the mind-scape and *raison d'être* of her narrators. I suggest that the 'wild and melancholy' tone of Brontë's poetry, with its ability to lift the reader, has much in common with concurrent descriptions of Methodist enthusiasm: as one observer of Wesley's revivalist exaltations noted, his religious frenzy excited 'an awful dread upon me,' making 'my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock.'<sup>8</sup>

Many believers moved by the furious expression of this preaching became fervently involved with their faith to an extent critics regarded as over-zealous. Wesley became forced to address this spiritual madness as 'religious enthusiasm' to counter those who opposed Methodism on these grounds. Dramatically inspired by a spiritual force, the enthusiast was intoxicated by religion, overdosing on its rules and so blinded to anything outside of faith. Valentine Cunningham and Stevie Davies observe that

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<sup>7</sup> 'God himself is within you, and hears and sees all,' in Epictetus, *Moral Discourses, Enchiridion and Fragments* (London: Everyman, 1910), II. viii, in Derek Roper and Edward Chitham, *The Poems of Emily Brontë* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p.271; Margaret Maison contends that Brontë read Elizabeth Carter's translation of Epictetus, *All the Works of Epictetus* (1758), in which was included a poem by Hester Chapone containing the line, 'No more repine, my coward Soul!' in 'Emily Brontë and Epictetus,' *Notes and Queries*, 223 (1978), 230-1.

enthusiasm was an 'emotive idea' for Brontë, and Charlotte's description of Emily as one fuelled by 'a secret power and fire that might have informed the brain and kindled the veins of a hero' reveals a secretive and slightly frenzied nature paralleling the emotions felt by the religious enthusiast.<sup>9</sup> A poet aware of, rather than suffering from the symptoms of enthusiasm, however, Brontë may be viewed as a writer who responded to religious frenzy as a religious and philosophical concept. As I argue below, she used enthusiasm to convey what she saw as a madness inherent to religion, both destructive, as an overwhelming power, and attractive, as that which promised excitement and a release of feeling.

The strange and haunting quality of her writing can be traced, then, not to some random supernatural or pantheistic force, but to the Methodist environment which caused her to read culture through a religious lens. Reading Brontë within a specifically religio-historical frame, I focus here on the manner in which her poetry reflects Methodist thought, and specifically its debate over enthusiasm, conceived as potent but dangerous. Overwhelmed by the presence of Methodist ideology within Yorkshire, Brontë looked to enthusiasm as a powerful form of expression that might subvert and topple the religious values within which she felt imprisoned. As *Wuthering Heights* attests through Joseph's hypocritical preaching and Lockwood's hollow middle-class religious values, Brontë rendered Christianity an oppressive force that contained within it the disingenuously vibrant feeling of enthusiasm.<sup>10</sup> Brontë's poetry explores Methodist enthusiasm as a potentially mutinous force, but consequently reveals it as a power that ultimately backfires and reinforces the religious values it initially sought to oppose. In the process, however, Brontë's poetical presentation of enthusiasm implies a criticism of the Christian frame in which she first encountered it, a system that problematically encouraged the believer to lose herself to the point where composure

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<sup>8</sup> R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), p.513.

<sup>9</sup> Valentine Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975); Davies, *Emily Brontë*, 1988, p.145; Charlotte Brontë, 'Biographical Notice,' pp.xxxii.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of Joseph's religion, see Davies, *Heretic*, pp.148ff.



and sanity were impossible to retrieve. Hence enthusiasm was directly connected to lunacy, as I discuss in Part II. Although accustomed with the developing discourse of madness as disease, Brontë still interpreted madness as enthusiasm, I argue, a testament to her imprisonment within the confines of religious ideology.

Brontë's poetical presentation of enthusiasm, then, leaves the believer dominated by both religion and a powerful God. This God is often rendered by Brontë as a sublime encounter, as in 'A sudden chasm of ghastly light,' or tyrannical presence, through the figure of Gondal's queen, A. G. A., as in 'Written in Aspin Castle' (1842-43).<sup>11</sup> From line one of the latter poem, Brontë asks the reader, 'How do I love on summer nights,' read another way, 'through what fervency of feeling can I express passion?' a question answered in the course of the poem's narrative in the evocation of enthusiasm. The poem tells the story of Lord Alfred S., forced to haunt Aspin Castle because shut out from heaven after committing suicide because of his fanatical, enthusiastic obsession with A. G. A. Alfred's first appearance comes as the 'native shepherds' are gathered

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<sup>11</sup> Roper and Chitham suggest there are 'three main attempts to reconstruct Gondal history' which can be found in Laura L. Hinkley, *The Brontës: Charlotte and Emily [With a Portrait]* (London: Hammond, Hammond and Co., 1947); Ratchford, *Gondal's Queen*; and W. D. Paden, *An Investigation of Gondal* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958), in *Poems*, pp.305-307; as noted above, I roughly follow Ratchford's narrative here, mostly because I agree with her centralization of A.G.A.; Gondal was founded upon the creative games played by the Brontë children in the late 1830s, in which they imagined warring islands inhabited by characters and persons of their own invention. Emily and Anne developed two islands: Gondal, 'a large island in the North Pacific' divided into four kingdoms; and its colony, Gaaldine, 'a large island in the newly discovered South Pacific,' owning six kingdoms (see Roper and Chitham, *Poems*, p.6). Gondal rather than Gaaldine accords with Brontë's own environment, its climate and topography resembling that of Yorkshire or Scotland with mountainous landscapes filled with snow, heather and lakes (see Roper and Chitham, *Poems*, p.9). The reader may surmise a dramatic tale of love, jealousy, war, suicide, infanticide, murder and revenge, if she attends to Ratchford's hypotheses. Princess of Alcona in Gondal, A.G.A. falls in love with Julius Brenzaida, Prince of Angora also in Gondal, meeting at the Palace of Instruction, a college for nobility and royalty. She leaves Brenzaida for Alexander of Elbë, provoking him to desert his wife, and the two men to engage in a battle in which Elbë dies. After imprisonment for treason, A.G.A. sails to Gaaldine where she engages in a romance with Lord Alfred S. who neglects his daughter Angelica as a result. Angelica too reveres A.G.A., however, until the latter steals her lover, Amedeus, and then exiles him. A.G.A. returns to her true love Brenzaida, abandoning Lord Alfred who is exiled to England where he commits suicide and haunts Aspin Castle. Brenzaida and A.G.A. forge and execute plans to seize Gondal and Gaaldine, deceive and imprison Gerald Exina, King of Gondal, and a number of his subjects in the process, and crown themselves Emperor and Empress of the two islands. Angelica and Amedeus contrive a plot against the new rulers, and Brenzaida is killed causing A.G.A. to flee with her newly born baby, whom she finds burdensome and so murders. Returning to assume her throne, A.G.A. is plagued by memories of Brenzaida and another past lover, Fernando De Samara, whose imprisonment and suicide she also induced. Angelica returns for revenge, however, and

around ‘their hearths’ in the grounds of Aspin Castle, swearing that they are haunted by a pale phantom with ‘spirit eyes of dreamy blue’ lingering around ‘his feudal home’ (ll.23, 30, 33, 46):

It always walks with head declined  
 Its long curls move not in the wind  
 Its face is fair – devinely fair;  
 But brooding on that angel brow  
 Rests such a shade of deep despair  
 As nought devine could ever know (ll.34-39).

The bewitched figure is Lord Alfred, his lowered head, ‘solemn eyes’ and static features conveying a statuesque and notably ‘devine’ trance, suggesting that he is caught in the power of a greater being (l.43). The ghost’s angel-like mask betrays the despair that weighs on his countenance, parallel to the ‘maniac fury’ that kindles under Catherine’s brow in *Wuthering Heights*, and an indication of his deranged enthusiastic feeling (*WH*, p.127).

The narrator moves from the atmospheric mist and twilight air of the external grounds of the Castle to its interior hall, where the ghost’s picture hangs. The supernatural image shines like an angel under the sun, but is changed ‘when the moonbeam chill and blue | Streams the spectral windows through’ rendering the ‘picture[ ] like a spectre too –’ (ll.56-58). Touched by the luminous light of the moon, Alfred’s guise becomes crazed where it seemed gentle, just as Brontë’s poem illuminates the frenzied core of a Christian belief-system assumed quiet and tranquil. Around the ghost’s terrifying portrait lie many rare artefacts mingling ‘beuty and mystry’: on his right, a picture of his daughter, Angelica; and ‘towards the western side’ a menacing

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A.G.A. falls, buried on the moors and mourned by Lord Eldred (adapted from Ratchford’s *Gondal’s Queen* and Roper and Chitham, *Poems*, pp.6-13, 306).

tribute to A. G. A. deemed 'Sidonia's deity!' (ll.61, 67). Although corroded, the godly statue outshines everything else in the gallery, bursting with glory, pride and cruelty, even as it crumbles like a ruined figurine whose 'eyes are dust' and 'lips are clay,' its entire form 'mouldered all away' (ll.84-85).<sup>12</sup>

A. G. A. is indeed omnipotent in the poem, as in Gondal, assuming a status and authority paralleling that of the Christian God. Her presence within the gallery is certainly worthy of the enthusiastic believer here, invoking a god capable of rousing wild and unruly states of mind:

And truly like a god she seems  
 Some god – of wild enthusiast's dreams  
 And this is she for whom he died!  
 For whom his spirit unforgiven,  
 Wanders unsheltered shut from heaven  
 An out cast for eternity – (ll.78-83).

A. G. A.'s spirit seems to explode from her marble cast here, and Alfred's love for her mirrors the worship an enthusiast throws on her god, signifying him as a mad Methodist. She in turn is lower than even the meanest worm, the narrator remarks, a harsh metaphor for God which serves to undermine enthusiasm and thus highlight the improbity of its vibrancy, forever an expression of religious feeling. As these images of destroyed passion peak, the narrator calls to the reader 'O come away!' directing us to leave 'these dreams' and exit through the Norman door of the castle, releasing us from this stage of religious frenzy (ll.92-95). I argue here that if the reader wishes to learn more about Brontë's conception of religion, she might usefully turn to the 'wild enthusiast' within

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<sup>12</sup> 'Sidonia' may refer to Alfred himself, the surname to which the S. in his title corresponds, furthering the enthusiastic character of the ghost who feels his godly A.G.A., 'Sidonia's deity,' to belong to him. Yet the name also invokes Milton's Sidonians, virgin attendees of Astoreth, and Meinhold's powerful heroine, Sidonia the Sorceress, feminizing Alfred to imply A.G.A.'s masculine power over him.



this poem, rather than the God of ‘No coward soul is mine.’ As I contend in chapter three, Brontë uses enthusiasm as a way to propel her narrators into the sublime, a imaginative space that falsely promises to supersede the religious orthodoxy that overwhelmed society. This chapter, however, proposes to define enthusiasm and the enthusiast as Brontë understood these notions through a Methodist frame of reference. Before exploring Brontë’s reading of Wesley’s work on the subject, and how she eventually came to understand religious fervour as madness, however, I illustrate below the specifically Methodist atmosphere Haworth granted the poet.

## I Methodism

Brontë was specifically concerned with an enthusiasm produced by a Protestant revival associated with simplicity, emotion, vibrancy and a personal faith open to all, providing much relief from a stale eighteenth-century established Church. In part stimulating a revival of the Church of England, and in part spurring dissent and nonconformity, the achievements of this movement are notable, following on from the revolutionary spirit existent at the end of the century to foster popular education through Robert Raikes’ creation of the Sunday School, Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce’s challenge to the slave-trade, and the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury’s successful campaign to establish the Factory Acts. While Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury between 1757 and 1768, insisted that his age was one in which religious values had fallen, the revival relied upon believers ready to express their faith with a fervency and enthusiasm alien within a demure early eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The publication of two devotional works by William

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<sup>13</sup> Secker declared: ‘In this we cannot be mistaken, that an open and professed disregard of religion is become, through a variety of unhappy causes, the distinguishing character of the age. Such are the dissoluteness and contempt of principle in the world, and the profligacy, intemperance, and fearlessness of committing crimes in the lower part, as must, if the torrent of impiety stop not, become absolutely fatal. Christianity is ridiculed and railed at with very little reserve; and the teachers of it without any at all,’ in *The Works of Thomas Secker: Published from the Original Manuscripts by Beilby Porteus and George Stinton To Which is Prefixed a Review of his Grace’s Life and Character* (B. Porteus), 6 vols (Dublin,

Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* (1726) and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728), were primary in intensifying this enthusiasm, provoking a personal intensity in religion not always sustainable within the established Church.

The terms 'Evangelical' and 'Methodist' were at first frequently interchangeable, the former used as an early label for adherents of the Reformation, and later attached to those who laid emphasis on personal conversion and the Atonement of Christ.<sup>14</sup> The driving force of this broad Protestant movement was the message of justification by faith, which insisted that Christ had done all that was needed for men and women to achieve salvation, belief and therefore, holiness. A resolute commitment to the reality of faith was seen as the sole condition of acceptance by God: sincerity in the performance of good works was not enough. This zealous promotion of faith verged on fanaticism for many opponents, who looked back to its seventeenth-century expression as that which had murdered the King. Its direct and adamant nature was derived from both the Presbyterians, evicted from the Church of England in 1662, and the Church of England Calvinists, whose unwavering tenet of the sovereignty of God disallowed human freedom.

Calvin's endorsement of the doctrine of predestination, that only the elect shall be saved, influenced the eighteenth-century Protestant revival to the extent that some of its many strands took on this systematic dogmatism, notably the Calvinist-Methodists in Wales. Yet convictions were inherited from both the Arminians, who believed, as did Wesley, that salvation is open to all, and the Moravians, whose emphasis on individual religious experience was, for Wesley at least, an over-assertion of faith's singular importance.<sup>15</sup> Regarded as the founder of Methodism, Wesley was a High churchman who forged his religious constancy as a counter to the worldliness of university life at

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1775; London, 1825), V, in Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England: 1734-1984* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1989), p.6.

<sup>14</sup> Elisabeth Jay, *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.3; *A Dictionary of English Church History* [1912], ed. S. L. Ollard and others (London and Oxford: A. R. Mowbray, 1948), p.215.

Christ Church, Oxford, where he studied in the 1720s. Frustrated with the frivolity of Oxford, and those he encountered there, including his brother Charles, Wesley was ordained deacon in 1725 and served for a while as his father's curate. He returned to Oxford three years later to find his brother more committed and attending church regularly, and Charles later claimed that the term Methodist had emanated from this routine.<sup>16</sup> The two brothers joined with their friends William Morgan and Robert Kirkham to form the 'Holy Club,' attended also by George Whitefield (then an Anglican deacon) and initiator of open-air mass evangelism or 'field-preaching.'

The Holy Club was grounded in the principle of justification by faith, advocating that the believer must demonstrate her faith without recourse to enthusiastic expression, despite its connection with Methodist emotion. Wesley's own heart-felt conversion on 24 May 1738 speaks of the enthusiast's experience, Wesley's religious disillusionment faded to be replaced by a strong belief and conviction in the love of a personal Saviour.<sup>17</sup> The Holy Club declared, however, that any personal salvation must be surpassed by the will to save others and followed a strict and almost ascetic routine involving frequent communion and fasts every Wednesday and Friday. David Simpson suggests that one root of the name Methodist can be traced back to the work of early physicians who 'put their patients under stringent regimens' like Wesley and his followers did when attempting to 'cure' the unbeliever.<sup>18</sup> The impulse to cure inspired Wesley to set about a huge conversion project, and between 1740 and 1840, Methodism underwent a rapid increase in membership, embracing almost 500 000 people in Britain alone.<sup>19</sup> The most dramatic outbursts of conversion occurred in two areas familiar to Brontë: Cornwall, the

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<sup>15</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp.22, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Stuart Andrews, *Methodism and Society* (London: Seminar Studies in History, Longman, 1970), p.25; see also V. H. H. Green's *The Young Mr Wesley: A Study of John Wesley and Oxford* (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), p.148 and *John Wesley* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964), p.28.

<sup>17</sup> Jay, *Evangelical*, p.3.

<sup>18</sup> David Simpson, *Romanticism, Nationalism and the Revolt Against Theory* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.33.

<sup>19</sup> David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p.12.



home of the Brontë's Aunt Branwell, and the West Riding of Yorkshire, notably the parish of Bradford of which Haworth was part.

In 1796, the West Riding had over 17 000 Methodist members, an immense number for one area.<sup>20</sup> The 1851 Census of Religious Worship indicates that Methodism held a prominent position well into the nineteenth century, stating that Methodists could still be 'found in the greatest force' in Yorkshire and Cornwall. Recent studies have also revealed Ireland as another area of mass Methodism, accounting for 23 per cent of the British Isles total.<sup>21</sup> Patrick Brontë, born in Imvel near Rathfriland, Ireland, in 1777, remained close to Methodism throughout his life, and G. Elsie Harrison contends that John Wesley would have been a familiar sight to the young Patrick who lived as a boy within Wesley's Irish recruiting range.<sup>22</sup> Of poor, though not absolutely impoverished background, Patrick sprang from a class productive of many Methodist adherents.

Appointed to Drumballyroney parish school in 1798, Patrick begun work with the Reverend Thomas Tighe, closely associated with both Wesley and the Evangelical camp of the Church of Ireland.<sup>23</sup> Under the influence of Tighe, Patrick matriculated at St. John's, Cambridge in 1802, and was swiftly befriended by the Cornish Wesleyan, Henry Martyn, who arranged for Patrick to draw assistance from his Church Missionary Society Fund.<sup>24</sup> In 1808, Patrick received a curacy at All Saints Wellington, Shropshire, and was assigned to work with the Welsh Methodist, the Reverend William Morgan, who introduced his fellow-curate to Mary Bosanquet-Fletcher, one of Wesley's few female preachers. Bosanquet had been married to Wesley's closest friend, John

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<sup>20</sup> As I stated in the previous chapter, Methodism in West Riding was supported by Methodist schools such as the Wesleyan Woodhouse Grove, where Patrick Brontë was examiner, and the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge attended by Brontë from the age of six; for statistics, see John Baxter, 'The Great Yorkshire Revival, 1792-6: A Study of Mass Revival among the Methodists,' *Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, ed. Michael Hill (London: S.C.M. Press, 1974), pp.46-76 (p.66).

<sup>21</sup> Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, p.15.

<sup>22</sup> G. Elsie Harrison, *The Clue to the Brontës* (London: Methuen, 1948), p.3.

<sup>23</sup> Amber M. Adams, 'Patronage and Poverty in County Down: The Case of Patrick Brontë,' *Ulster Folklife*, 33 (1987), 26-31 (p.27).

Fletcher, until his death in 1785, and had stayed at Madeley Vicarage in order to recruit young curates for the fostering of Methodism around the country. Through her, Patrick met many avid Methodist supporters, and learned from the Madeley group that Bradford was in need of clergymen, a parish situated in the revivalist 'Promised Land' of Yorkshire.<sup>25</sup> Patrick became curate at All Saints' Dewsbury, near Bradford, in December 1809, a parish in which Wesley had preached in 1742, and which had retained a strong element of religious nonconformity. After only six months, he started to push for a more independent post and was finally granted this in 1811 at St Peter's, Hartshead, also in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Hartshead was marked by poverty, high taxes and low wages, and the Luddite outbreaks in the West Riding from 1812 soon began to involve Patrick's parishioners.<sup>26</sup> Several mills in the area had introduced labour-saving machinery, provoking the Luddites to riot as a way of protesting their cause and defending their rights. In 1812, *The Leeds Mercury* reported one such attack on a Mr. Joseph Hirst of Marsh, Huddersfield, stating: 'With their faces blackened, and their persons in other respects disguised [a number of men] having forcibly obtained admittance into the dressing shops, proceeded to destroy all the machinery used in the dressing of cloth, such as dressing frames, shears, and other implements used in what is commonly called Gig Mills, the whole of which were completely demolished.'<sup>27</sup> While Patrick frowned upon Luddite activity, he empathized with their rationale due to the large percentage of Luddite sympathisers attending his Church. The Luddites too were associated with Methodism, a movement which had allowed laymen to exercise their own thoughts, assume responsibility and take up official positions. Even conservative Methodists were not Tory in politics, Owen Chadwick suggests, having endured an establishment critical

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<sup>24</sup> John Lock and Canon W.T. Dixon, *A Man of Sorrow: The Life, Letters and Times of the Rev. Patrick Brontë 1777-1861* (London: Nelson, 1965), p.19.

<sup>25</sup> Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996), p.29.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p.47.

<sup>27</sup> *The Leeds Mercury*, 29 February 1812, in Robert F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working-Class Movements of England: 1800-1850* (London: The Epworth Press, 1937), p.20.

of their 'meetings of personal witness and fervour, love-feasts, and watch-nights, unknown to the dull solemnity of contemporary Church of Englandism.'<sup>28</sup>

Methodism changed in the nineteenth century, however, dissociating itself from radicalism under the rule of Jabez Bunting, president of the Methodist conference from 1820. He was horrified that six out of the seventeen Luddites executed at York for the murder of William Horsfall, a wool manufacturer from Marsden, and the attacks on Rawfolds Mill, were sons of Methodists. For Bunting, Yorkshire ministers such as Brontë's father encouraged a religious free-for-all, writing in 1813: 'Methodism in the West Riding of Yorkshire has become more swift than solid; more extensive than deep; more in the increase of numbers, than in the diffusion of that kind of piety, which shines as brightly & operates as visibly at home as in the prayer meeting and the crowded love-feast.'<sup>29</sup> While Patrick was no Methodist radical, his successor, the Reverend Thomas Atkinson, noted that Patrick had consented to allow the bodies of the hanged Luddites to be secretly buried in Hartshead churchyard in the middle of the night.<sup>30</sup> As Juliet Barker suggests, while the truth of this anecdote is questionable, it indicates the general belief that Patrick sided with the Luddites, unable to disinherit a class-based sense of solidarity.<sup>31</sup> Patrick was attracted to the Wesleyan flexibility of faith, often talking of 'Mr. Wesley's excellent little tracts,' and removed from Methodism only when it assumed a controlling and regimented guise.<sup>32</sup> Bunting's fixed ideology was unsuited to the people of West Riding, including Brontë, who, like her fellow parishioners, was inclined to reinterpret faith for herself.

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<sup>28</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), I, p.375.

<sup>29</sup> Jabez Bunting, letter to Richard Reece, 15 July 1803, in David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion: 1750-1900* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.100.

<sup>30</sup> See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1963), for his radical assault upon Methodism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century; contemporary historians, however, writing contra E. P. Thompson, seem united in positing Methodism as a progressive force, its strength stemming from an ability to escape definition and therefore dogma; see Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p.33; and Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, p.25.

<sup>31</sup> Barker, *Brontës*, p.47.

<sup>32</sup> Harrison, *Clue*, p.4.



Methodism continued to spread throughout the West Riding, however, and in 1812, the Wesleyans opened a new boarding school for the sons of preachers and ministers at Woodhouse Grove, employing John Fennell as headmaster, with whom Patrick had worked at Wellington. While examining at the school during its preliminary year, Patrick met Maria Branwell, Fennell's niece by marriage, a strongly committed Methodist from Penzance in Cornwall.<sup>33</sup> The newly introduced couple married the same year, and by 1815 had moved to Thornton where Patrick had secured another curacy. It was here that Emily Brontë was born in 1818 into a notably Methodist environment, christened by the Welsh Methodist, William Morgan, god-parented by the Fennells, and taking the middle-name of Maria's cousin, Jane. The Brontës were not fully settled until 1820, when, after a long process of negotiation, Patrick took up the position of minister at Old Haworth Church, a stronghold of the Evangelical revival with markedly Methodist sympathies.<sup>34</sup>

Patrick's relationship with his fourth born is widely commented upon by biographers and critics alike, Chitham, for example, contending that Emily excelled the other Brontës 'not only in intellect, but in vivacious appearance and character' as the favourite of Patrick.<sup>35</sup> For John Lock and W.T. Dixon too, Brontë was 'for Patrick, the son he had so longed for,' aiding him with the composition of sermons as he taught her to shoot a pistol, a skill at which she became very proficient according to the Haworth stationer, John Greenwood.<sup>36</sup> The connection between father and daughter is, to some

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<sup>33</sup> Barker, *Brontës*, p.57.

<sup>34</sup> Lock and Dixon, *Man of Sorrow*, p.212.

<sup>35</sup> Chitham, *A Life*, pp.29-32, 243.

<sup>36</sup> Chitham writes that Brontë proof read and corrected Patrick's sermon on the Haworth 'earthquake.' The disaster, actually a flood, scarred the moors, throwing boulders and earth down the side of a hill and breaking through stone bridges until reaching the hamlet of Ponden. *The Leeds Mercury* reported that it was here that the flood 'expanded over some cornfields, covering them to depth of several feet' and 'choking up the watercourse' and witnesses later stated that 'it seemed as if the whole moor top were turning over on its side and rolling downwards' as a 'black and sticky' torrent. According to Chitham's sources, the printers of Patrick's sermon on the eruption, Mr Inkersley and his workmen, remember Emily 'correcting the proofs, her father carrying on a vigorous conversation with Mr Inkersley on the politics of the day,' *A Life*, pp.29-32; Lock and Dixon cite a diary entry by Greenwood, stating that: Patrick 'had such unbounded confidence in his daughter Emily, knowing, as he did her unparalleled intrepidity and firmness, that he resolved to learn her to shoot too. They used to practice with pistols. Let her be ever so

extent, reflected in Brontë's Gondal poem, 'Faith and Despondency' (1844). Here, a father figure draws his child close, begging her to "Forsake thy books, and matless play" to talk with him into the "pensive" evening (ll.3, 5). As he mourns those he has lost, now dead beneath "mountains cold," the daughter reassures him that there is "a blessed shore," a "land divine," where she believes he will be reunited with his loved ones, "Restored into the Deity" (ll.20, 55, 58). Yet it is the father that imposes upon the 'Emily' figure the 'fervent hope' that humanity might reach an 'eternal home' once the 'wind and Ocean's roar' between have been battled through (ll. 67-68). As I argue in chapter three, the ocean offers Brontë's narrators a gateway to liberty which they cannot reach, and yet the attempt to reach such freedom is urgent and desperate. If 'Faith and Despondency' reflects Brontë's philosophy at all, it is through its positioning of an enthusiastic need to escape religion.

As the successor of William Grimshaw, one of the leading Methodist parsons of Yorkshire, Patrick should have been familiar with religious fervour as enthusiasm. The arrival of William Grimshaw in 1742 is described by Lock and Dixon as one of the most important events in the parish's history, and his fearsome presence caused laity numbers to rise sharply.<sup>37</sup> Grimshaw notoriously made church attendants recite long Psalms

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busy in her domestic duties, whether in the kitchen baking bread, at which she had such [a] dainty hand, or at her ironing, or at her studies, wrapt in a world of her own creating - it mattered not; if he called upon her to take a lesson, she would put all down. His tender and affectionate "Now, my dear girl, let me see how well you can shoot today," was irresistible to her filial nature, and her most winning and musical voice would be heard to ring through the house in response "Yes, papa!" and away she would run with such a hearty goodwill, taking the board from him and tripping like a fairy down to the bottom of the garden, putting it in its proper position, then returning to her dear, revered parent, take the pistol, which he had previously primed and loaded for her. "Now, my girl," he would say, "take time, be steady." "Yes, papa," she would say, taking the weapon with as firm hand and as steady an eye as any veteran of the camp and fire. Then she would run to fetch the board for him to see how she had succeeded. And she did get so proficient, that she was rarely far from the mark. His 'how cleverly you have done, my dear girl!' was all she cared for. She knew she had gratified him and she would return the pistol, saying, "Load again, papa!" and away she would go into the kitchen, roll another shelf-full of teacakes, then, wiping her hands, she would return again to the garden and call out, "I'm ready again, papa," and so they would go on until he thought she had had enough practice for that day. "Oh!" he would exclaim, "she is a brave and noble girl. She is my right hand, nay, the very apple of my eye!" in 'Letters, Diary and Documents of John Greenwood Belonging to Mrs Mary Preston, Haworth, Yorkshire,' in Lock and Dixon, *Man of Sorrow*, p.369-370.

<sup>37</sup> Lock and Dixon, *Man of Sorrow*, p.212; see also, Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* [1857], ed. Elisabeth Jay (London: Penguin, 1997), pp.25ff.

while he left the Church to find absentees drinking in the Black Bull or playing Sunday football in the fields and churchyard. Searching out riders on the moors, Grimshaw would bring them off their horses and make them pray.<sup>38</sup> His unwilling hearers were beaten with a riding crop and driven to Church, and yet Grimshaw is often remembered as a compassionate man in the literature of the period. His biographer Frank Baker records that Grimshaw's memory was very much alive when the Brontës arrived at Haworth, and declares that 'his ecstatic devotions, his robust preaching, and his swashbuckling spiritual discipline formed an important component in the background of the Brontë children. Particularly was this true of Emily.'<sup>39</sup> Baker also suggests that the charismatic Grimshaw may have stood as a prototype for Heathcliff, his name echoed in that of his possible father, Mr Earnshaw.

Testimony to Grimshaw's Methodist status can be found in the early deeds to Methodist property, which name him as third in line to the position of Methodist leader, listed after only John and Charles Wesley, with whom he was great friends.<sup>40</sup> The brothers often visited Haworth, and on one occasion, Grimshaw was forced to fix a scaffold on the outside of the Church to accommodate the masses flocking to hear John Wesley's morning sermon, only to be greeted by an even larger congregation in the afternoon.<sup>41</sup> 'What has God wrought in the midst of those rough mountains!' wrote John Wesley of Haworth's sublime geography, noting that he had 'never [seen] a church better filled.'<sup>42</sup> While nearly all the most prominent Methodists preached at Haworth, including the Wesleys, George Whitefield and John Newton, many others, such as the Countess of Huntingdon, Whitefield's patroness, attended as part of the congregation.

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<sup>38</sup> G. R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (London: Church Book Room Press, 1908), pp.52-57, 231.

<sup>39</sup> Frank Baker, *William Grimshaw: 1708-1763* (London: The Epworth Press, 1963), p.267.

<sup>40</sup> Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People*, p.188.

<sup>41</sup> On Grimshaw and Wesley's meetings at Haworth, see C. E. Vulliamy, *John Wesley* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1931), pp.290-294.

<sup>42</sup> John Wesley, *The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M. Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford: Enlarged from the Original MSS., with Notes from Unpublished Diaries, Annotations, Maps and Illustrations*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, VIII vols (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), IV, 12 July, 1761, pp.468-469.



In 1753, Whitefield assisted Grimshaw to administer communion to a crowd that filled the church four times over, many enthusiastically shrieking out and fainting.<sup>43</sup> Living amidst such history, Brontë was enthralled by the enthusiasm of preacher and believer alike, attracted to the power of eighteenth-century Methodism while repelled from the changed and fragmented Methodism of the nineteenth century.

Grimshaw too rejected Methodism when Wesley ruled that preachers should be licensed in accordance with the 1689 Act of Toleration, that is, without ordination and so lacking an intellectual background in theology. Services were deemed devotional exercises wherein the participants could commune directly with God, and they were warned not to call preachers ‘ministers’ to avoid all allusion to ecclesiastical authority. Methodism thus came to signify non-conformism and in 1808, *The Edinburgh Review* claimed that Evangelists, Wesleyans and Calvinists should be classed under ‘the general term of Methodism.’<sup>44</sup> Wesley too remarked: ‘It is not easy to reckon up the various accounts which have been given of the People called Methodists. Very many of them as far remote from the truth as that given by the good gentleman in Ireland, “*Methodists!* Ay, they are the people who place all religion in *wearing long beards.*”’<sup>45</sup> Wesley insisted that Methodism was neither Church nor sect, denying that his design was to form a Church, and preferring the title ‘Society.’<sup>46</sup> The lack of unification within Methodism excused it from having to form a coherent and rigid set of doctrines and Wesley stressed the absence of any distinctive orthodoxy. He required only that the

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<sup>43</sup> Lock and Dixon, *Man of Sorrow*, p.210.

<sup>44</sup> Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People*, pp.208, 64; the situation was provoked further by the many breakaway groups that claimed affiliation with Methodism; E. P. Thompson lists some of the many ‘breakway [sic] groups of “Ranters” - the Welsh “Jumpers” (cousins to the American “Shakers”), the Primitive Methodists, the “Tent Methodists,” the “Magic Methodists” of Delemere Forest, who fell into “trances” or “visions,” the Bryanites or Bible Christians, the “Quaker Methodists” of Warrington and the “Independent Methodists” of Macclesfield,’ *Working Class*, p.388.

<sup>45</sup> John Wesley, ‘A Short History of Methodism’ [1765], in *The Works of John Wesley: The Methodist Societies, History, Nature and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, 26 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), IX, pp.367-372 (p.367).

<sup>46</sup> Frederick Dreyer, ‘A “Religious Society Under Heaven”: John Wesley and the Identity of Methodism,’ *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), 62-83 (pp.65, 66).

subject express a vehement desire to save her soul and a wish to flee from the 'wrath to come.'<sup>47</sup>

Such ardour of expression was directed to Methodist women as well as men, justifying Brontë's exploration of enthusiasm. Wesley even encouraged his female members to preach, articulating the availability of God's grace to everyone who wished to be saved. He asked: "'But may not *women*, as well as men, bear a part in this honourable service?'" answering, 'Undoubtedly they may; nay, they ought; it is meet, right, and their bounden duty.' Wesley found 'no difference' between male and female believers, addressing the latter thus: "'there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus" [ . . . ] You, as well as men, are rational creatures. You, like them, were made in the image of God; you are equally candidates for immortality; you too are called of God, as you have time, to "do good unto all men." Be "not disobedient to the heavenly calling."'"<sup>48</sup> Wesley's mother influenced her son's estimation of the opposite sex and Isaac Reeves listed Susanna Wesley as an eminent British intellectual and educator of John Wesley in *The Intellect of Woman* (1859).<sup>49</sup> The daughter of a dissenting minister, Susanna Wesley received an excellent education in theology and classics and even led religious services at Epworth when her high Tory husband was absent from his post, much to his concern. While the tension between a dissenting mother and conservative father may account for Wesley's own schizophrenic politics, his belief that women were autonomous from men and equal to them was clear.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid*, p.66.

<sup>48</sup> John Wesley, 'Sermon 98: On Visiting the Sick' [1786], in *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons III: 71-114*, ed. Albert C. Outler, 26 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), III, pp.384-397 (p.396); see also Dale A. Johnson, ed., *Women in English Religion* (New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), p.71.

<sup>49</sup> Isaac Reeve, *The Intellect of Woman Not Naturally Inferior to that of Man and the Consequent Importance of its Being Developed by a More Solid Course of Education* (London: Piper, Stephenson and Spence, 1859), p.121.

<sup>50</sup> Cynthia Cupples, 'Pious Ladies and Methodist Madams: Sex and Gender in Anti-Methodist Writings of Eighteenth-Century England,' *Critical Matrix*, 5 (1990), 30-60 (p.37).

In the eighteenth century, over half of Britain's Methodists were women, many of whom were unmarried and relatively independent.<sup>51</sup> Towards the end of the period, Methodist societies in Lancashire and Cheshire averaged a fifty-five percent female membership and in urban centres like Manchester, Stockport and London, the figure rose to seventy percent.<sup>52</sup> Methodism thus fostered a new image of woman that emphasized her role as a guardian of moral standards and piety, rather than as a licentious Eve.<sup>53</sup> A prominent example of this can be found in the figure of Hannah More, a poet and political writer whose humanitarian interests coincided with Evangelism's stress on individual responsibility towards one's community. Aspiring and middle-class, More had little to do with Methodism as a lower-class movement and yet she remains representative of the philanthropic woman, expressing a steady piety fashionable at the time. Respected within society as a literary and radical writer, More seems to have benefited from the apparent liberation Evangelist leagues offered.<sup>54</sup> Methodism granted women opportunities for self-expression, often of an intellectual nature as Brontë proves, female solidarity, equality with men, and even economic power to those who could afford to become patronesses, providing Pauline conservatives with a dangerous female challenge that offered enthusiastic belief, activity, and socio-cultural recognition. Even Wesley's system of 'classes,' containing twelve people who supported each other's faith, educational progress and personal well-being, was formed on the basis of group compatibility rather than gender, making official the role of female religious leadership.<sup>55</sup>

Women's importance as class-leaders, Sunday-School teachers and local preachers endured within Methodism and while women were prohibited from the role of

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<sup>51</sup> See Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp.107ff.

<sup>52</sup> Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, p.13.

<sup>53</sup> Cupples, 'Pious Ladies,' pp.36fn14, 31.

<sup>54</sup> M. G. Jones, *Hannah More* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp.77-81.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, *Women in English Religion*, p.63.



preacher in any strict sense, Wesley's letters suggest otherwise.<sup>56</sup> In a letter to Patrick's Madeley acquaintance, Mary Bosanquet, for example, Wesley states that a woman is required to preach if she receives 'an *extraordinary* call,' inviting women to feel their faith in more fervent, and notably enthusiastic, terms.<sup>57</sup> Wesley was cautious of encouraging enthusiasm after his Holy Club fellow, William Morgan, died of religious mania in 1732, but his advice to Bosanquet reveals mixed feelings.<sup>58</sup> Wesley is often credited with rejecting enthusiasm because he turned away from mysticism, regarding it as 'passive, introspective and anti-intellectual.'<sup>59</sup> Brontë remained attracted to enthusiasm, but like Wesley, was unconcerned with mysticism, agreeing with the preacher that it formed an anti-intellectual spirituality. The violent and frenzied tone her poetry and novel adopt deny the serenity of mysticism as a kind of inertia reflected in Linton's idea of heaven, one that the young Cathy feels is "half alive" in comparison to her more favourably presented "glorious jubilee" where everything appears to sparkle (WH, p.245). This sparkling world is the fervent vision of the enthusiast, an enlightened but intoxicating realm that Brontë depicted to convey powerful emotions.

## II Enthusiasm

Brontë encountered enthusiasm, I contend, as a state of religious delirium felt by believers and expressed within hymns, poetry and sermons, each genre attributing to her

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<sup>56</sup> The obvious literary example of a woman Methodist preacher is Dinah Morris in George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859); on the role of women preachers in the nineteenth century see Christine L. Krueger, *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), and Ellen Moers' earlier discussion in *Literary Women*, intro. Helen Taylor (London: The Women's Press, 1978), pp.192ff.

<sup>57</sup> John Wesley, letter to Mary Bosanquet, 13 June 1771; Wesley also addressed the infamous writings of St Paul by contending that this prophesying did not refer to Methodist preaching anyway; see also John Wesley, letter to Thomas Whitehead, 10 February 1748, on the differences between Quakerism and Christianity, in Johnson, *Women in English Religion*, pp.69, 67-8.

<sup>58</sup> Morgan's early death in 1732, associated with religious mania, is assumed to have been connected to the extremity of his fasting, lack of sleep and general frugality and Wesley was forced to make a case in the defence of their club; it is notable that religious fasting is in many ways linked to the issue of anorexia nervosa, a condition that Kathleen Frank argues Brontë suffered from, see *Emily Brontë: A Chainless Soul* (London: Penguin, 1992).

employment of the concept as it appears in her poetry and novel. The Wesleyan hymn form, for example, is a genre the poet imitated in her poetry as I point out below, marking the content as partly religious through its form. The genre of poetry too was proclaimed inherently enthusiastic by such critics as John Dennis, Robert Lowth and William Hazlitt. Deemed an irrational and furious force by writers such as the third Earl of Shaftesbury and David Hume, enthusiasm became a cultural signifier for lunacy and impetuosity, thus rendering religion illogical and so implausible. Religious leaders responded to this situation by dismissing enthusiasm, George Lavington, Bishop of Exeter, unleashing an unreserved written assault upon Methodism and Wesley for popularizing and encouraging enthusiastic feeling. In detailed explorations of enthusiasm, Wesley in turn claimed that enthusiasts were madmen rather than Christian believers, at once denouncing the subject while betraying an interest in it as a strong force of conversion.

Brontë's own ambiguous relationship with enthusiasm parallels Wesley's simultaneous rejection and expression of it, a relationship to which a further dimension was added by the poet's association of enthusiasm with insanity. Confronted by the public debate concerning the York Asylum, Brontë, I argue, linked insanity with the dispute that ensued between Lavington and Wesley on enthusiasm's delirious qualities. Her consequent interpretation of enthusiasm as a specifically religious madness, rather than a medical problem, however, conveys Brontë's captivity within religious ideology. Even as the secular critic explicated enthusiasm, her approach remained within a religious frame of reference. Denied the complex rationalizations of Hume and later, Matthew Arnold, for example, Brontë could not separate this powerful expression of feeling from the religious domain in which she primarily encountered it, caught within Methodist ideology. After examining enthusiasm in relation to poetry and the hymn form, I turn to its definition as advanced by critics such as Shaftesbury, Hume, Lavington and Wesley, exploring the poet's access to the latter's writing. The chapter is

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<sup>59</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p.38.

concluded with an examination of enthusiasm as a type of lunacy, focusing on Brontë's inability to render it within the medical discourse of madness, locating it always within religion.

Poetry was deemed the most suitable genre through which to convey enthusiasm, especially in the theological form of the hymn, used by Brontë in poems, for example, like 'The night of storms has passed' (1837), 'I die but when the grave shall press' (1837), 'Weaned from life and torn away' (1837) and 'How clear she shines! How quietly' (1843). D. W. Bebbington argues that poetry was the most popular literary genre of Protestant revivalism, best suited to convey God's message as a style expressive of 'perspicuity and purity, propriety, strength,' as Wesley remarked.<sup>60</sup> Evangelical hymnody emerged from Augustan poetics, designed to communicate Christian doctrine in a clear and precise manner, offering a place for the worshipper to begin her meditations on the bible.<sup>61</sup> While often devoid of literary merit, the hymn versified tenets of scriptural law in an accessible and memorable manner enabled by its tune and metre.<sup>62</sup> As Ken Burrows argues, Brontë's verse is infused with the 'long, short, and common measures of Watts and the Wesleys and Cowper.'<sup>63</sup> Herbert Dingle also comments on the forceful and 'positive' mood of Brontë's poetry, coupling it with the dominant tone of the hymn.<sup>64</sup> As many of Charles Wesley's hymns attest, the genre had the capacity to elevate the believer into a sublime feeling of faith and it is this that Brontë attempted to invert as a way of escaping religion. For Burrows too, the poet

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<sup>60</sup> John Wesley, letter to Samuel Furley, 15 July 1764, in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p.67.

<sup>61</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, pp.67-69.

<sup>62</sup> Wesley claimed that the hymn was designed to persuade 'the critic to turn Christian rather than the Christian to turn critic,' John Wesley, letter to Luke Tyerman (n.d.), in Balleine, *A History*, p.29.

<sup>63</sup> Ken C. Burrows, 'Some Remembered Strain: Methodism and the Anti-Hymns of Emily Brontë,' *West Virginia University Philological Papers*, 24 (1977), 48-61 (p.49); Burrows notes that "'common measure" classically consists of a quatrain of alternating eight- and six-syllable lines; "short measure" is a quatrain of three six-syllable lines and one – the third - eight-syllable line; "long measure" traditionally has a quatrain of eight-syllable lines. All of the stanzas may be doubled'; on hymn-metre, see also Donald Davie, *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.107ff.

<sup>64</sup> Herbert Dingle, *The Mind of Emily Brontë* (London: Martin Brian and O'Keefe, 1974), p.33.



manipulated the form to create an 'anti-hymn' which imitated the genre 'in order to reject a form of worship [Brontë] found stultifying.'<sup>65</sup>

Burrow's argument rests upon his declaration that Brontë's anti-hymn specifically enacted 'a bitter indictment of the Evangelical emphasis upon individual sin which to Brontë constituted an imprisonment of the spirit.'<sup>66</sup> She subverted her ostensibly controlled use of hymnal diction, syntax, stanza and rhetoric, Burrows claims, by a nervous 'energy' that cast scorn upon religious ideals. Brontë's poem, 'There let thy bleeding branch atone' (n.d.), for example, mimics the Wesleyan hymn beginning, 'See streaming [sic] from the accursed Tree | His all atoning Blood!'<sup>67</sup> For Burrows, Brontë's poem parodies choric communal worship by constructing the narrator as isolated and alone, a solitary being that deems God's name 'cursed' (l.5).<sup>68</sup> The predominant 'icon of the crucifix' is thus transformed from an image of forgiveness to one of vindictiveness.<sup>69</sup> God becomes an angry tyrant, his wrath a 'wondering maze' the narrator spends many useless and 'mad hours' trapped within, so highlighting what Burrows calls the 'constraint and madness of pietistic Evangelical worship' (ll.9, 10).<sup>70</sup> Where Burrows believes Brontë finally repudiated organized religion, I argue that she was unable to defeat the sway over her exerted by the legacy of the Protestant revival. In any case, Brontë's intellectual interest in Methodist language as a vehicle of intense passion is undeniable, and her awareness of hymn form remains apparent. Moreover, the hymn's ability to drive the believer into a furious, almost crazed state linked it back to enthusiasm, a point many literary critics considered while discussing the genre of poetry.

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<sup>65</sup> Burrows, 'Some Remembered Strain,' pp.51-52.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, p.52.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Wesley, Jr., *John Wesley's First Hymn-Book: A Collection of Psalms and Hymns* [1737], ed. Frank Baker and George Walton Williams (Charleston: Dalcho Historical Society, 1964), p.44, in Burrows, 'Some Remembered Strain,' p.52.

<sup>68</sup> Burrows, 'Some Remembered Strain,' p.53.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, p.52.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid*, p.57.

In 1701 John Dennis published 'The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry' which suggested that enthusiasm was an essential characteristic of poetry, a sentiment echoed by many critics. Robert Lowth, for example, argued that poetical language originated from the feeling of enthusiasm within the mind and James Usher stated that 'Enthusiasm is the very soul of poetry.'<sup>71</sup> William Hazlitt too declared that wherever 'any object takes such a hold of the mind as to make us dwell upon it, and brood over it, melting the heart in tenderness, or kindling it to a sentiment of enthusiasm [ . . . ] this is poetry.'<sup>72</sup> Such commentary reveals that enthusiasm invoked the same treatment as the sublime, and Dennis contended that the latter concept was constituted by the former, each communicable only through poetry. Poetical language, Dennis thought, was the ultimate imitation of nature and the most suitable medium through which to present God with one's thoughts. The genre, he argued, is as full of passion as the human body is of spirit, marked by an enthusiasm distinguishable from mere sensation.<sup>73</sup> Where excitement was caused by immediate gratification, enthusiastic passions were effected by meditative concentration on complex issues.<sup>74</sup> As Brontë conveys in 'The Philosopher' (1845), too much thought falls into 'dreaming' and 'unlightened' feelings that stimulate enthusiasm, here figured as so "wild" that not even "Heaven" can "all or half fulfill" them (ll.2-3, 11-12). Dennis argued that enthusiastic passion of this kind could transform both poetry and humanity, however, shaping the mind with a religious cast. Thus poetry emerges from an enthusiasm 'moved by the ideas in contemplation,' rather than a 'vulgar passion' which is moved by

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<sup>71</sup> Bishop Robert Lowth, *The Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1753), trans. from the Latin by George Gregory (1787); James Usher, *Clio* (1767), in Susie Tucker, *Enthusiasm: A Study in Semantic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp.79, 84.

<sup>72</sup> William Hazlitt, 'On Poetry in General,' *Lectures on the English Poets* (1802), in Tucker, *Enthusiasm*, p.92.

<sup>73</sup> John Dennis, 'The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,' (1701), in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* ed. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.32-34 (p.33).

<sup>74</sup> David B. Morris, *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in Eighteenth-Century England* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), p.50; Morris points out that Dennis' distinction mirrors Locke's separation of sensation and reflection.

‘the objects themselves’: a potentially intellectual endeavour, then, rather than a purely instinctive one.<sup>75</sup>

This promotion of enthusiasm as the key to a more liberal society sharply contrasted with many enlightenment notions of enthusiasm which deemed it a dangerous and irrational folly. For the third Earl of Shaftesbury, enthusiasm was a ‘growing mischief,’ a ‘disease’ which inflamed the individual like a contagious itch.<sup>76</sup> He believed that it was the ‘poets’ who stood as ‘ringleaders and teachers of this heresy’ of enthusiasm, enchanting their readers with a feeling ultimately inducive of fierce panic (‘On Enthusiasm,’ p.96). Panic, a dangerous mix of ‘enthusiasm and horrors of a superstitious kind,’ caused the sufferer to lose all reason and moderation (p.93). Shaftesbury indicated that this loss of reason should be attributed to religion by using the signifiers ‘enthusiasm’ to render Protestantism, and ‘superstition’ for Roman Catholicism. A common password for Catholicism, ‘superstition’ produced a heightened state referred to as ‘fanaticism,’ described by Voltaire as a ‘delirium’ that drove the believer mad like enthusiasm, but inspired criminal actions that flaunted both the law and morality.<sup>77</sup> Coleridge too separated enthusiasm from fanaticism declaring: ‘Fanaticism is the fever of *superstition*. Enthusiasm, on the contrary, implies an undue (or when used in a good sense, an unusual) vividness of ideas.’<sup>78</sup> Like Dennis, Coleridge believed enthusiasm to possess insightful qualities stirring ‘intellectual powers’ whereas fanaticism and superstition could not.<sup>79</sup>

David Hume also granted enthusiasm a favourable position in ‘Of Superstition and Enthusiasm’ (1741), a state in which ‘raptures, transports, and surprising flights of

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<sup>75</sup> John Dennis, ‘The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry’ (1704), in Ashfield and de Bolla, *Sublime*, pp.35-39 (p.35).

<sup>76</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, ‘On Enthusiasm,’ *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc.* (1699), in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin, 1995), pp.90-96 (pp.92-94); further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>77</sup> François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, ‘Reflections on Religion,’ *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764), in Kramnick, *Enlightenment Reader*, pp.115-133 (p.115).

<sup>78</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge’s Notes on English Divines*, ed. Derwent Coleridge (1853), II, 39-40, in Tucker, *Enthusiasm*, p.47.



fancy' were produced.<sup>80</sup> Hume regarded superstition, however, as a state which depresses the individual's spirits to such an extent that she cannot approach God, distressed by her unworthiness and forced to use a Priest as mediator ('Of Superstition,' p.5). Enthusiasts are more 'free from the yoke of ecclesiastics,' experiencing a 'fury' like 'that of thunder and tempest, which exhaust themselves in a little time, and leave the air more calm and serene than before' (p.7). Where superstition 'renders men [sic] tame and submissive,' enthusiasm 'is naturally accompanied with a spirit of liberty,' a sentiment echoed by Brontë's prisoner-narrators who use its intensity to try and psychologically break from their cells in poems such as 'There was a time when my cheek burned' (1839) and 'His land may burst the galling chain' (n.d.) ('Of Superstition,' p.8). An experience 'founded on strong spirits, and a presumptuous boldness of character,' Hume declared, enthusiasm is easily traced to narrators such as A. G. A., animated and fearless (p.7). As Karen O'Brien remarks with reference to Hume's essay, 'enthusiasm tends to promote liberty, whereas superstition generally promotes political passivity,' capable of impassioning the subject to the point where she will act merely because over-zealous.<sup>81</sup> Brontë too found enthusiasm a potentially liberatory force that could be separated from the superstitious qualities of orthodox religion, although her narrators fail to achieve this freedom, caught within Christian ideology like their creator. This downfall can be attributed to Brontë's reading of enthusiasm, not simply as a theological concept, but as one which she learned through Wesley's often deeply ambiguous commentaries upon enthusiasm. To establish

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<sup>79</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Philosophical Lectures* (1819), ed. E. J. K. Coburn, Lecture XI, in Tucker, *Enthusiasm*, p.19.

<sup>80</sup> David Hume, 'Of Superstition and Religion,' *Essays: Moral and Political* (1741), in *David Hume: Writings on Religion*, ed. Antony Flew (Chicago: Open Court, 1992), pp.3-9 (p.4); further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text, and where necessary, signified by the title 'Of Superstition.'

<sup>81</sup> Karen O'Brien focuses on Hume's *History of England* (1754-62), which also comments on enthusiasm as a force capable of moving one to act beyond her reason, usurping 'every other motive for action,' in *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.80, 82.

Brontë's understanding of enthusiasm through Wesley, I turn to the preacher's attitude towards and writing on enthusiasm.

Wesley was variously credited as a defender and opponent of religious enthusiasm. While Horace Walpole found Wesley's preaching pitch enactive of a 'very ugly enthusiasm,' the Methodist John Nelson remarked of him: 'As soon as he got upon his stand, he stroked back his hair, and turned his face towards me where I stood, and I thought fixed his eyes upon me. His countenance struck such an awful dread upon me, before I heard him speak, that it made my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock; and when he did speak, I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me.'<sup>82</sup> For believers such as Nelson, Wesley experienced and invoked enthusiastic feeling while preaching, whether to the individual sinner or to a larger crowd while field-preaching at open-air meetings. Wesley learned the technique of mass evangelism from George Whitefield, who, aged just twenty-four, gathered crowds from a few hundred as in Usk, near Cardiff, where he preached from 'a table under a large tree,' to 'no less than twenty thousand' in Rose Green, Bristol.<sup>83</sup> Of the latter occasion Whitefield wrote in a journal entry dated 18 March 1739: 'To behold such crowds stand about us in such an awful silence, and to hear the echo of their singing run from one end of them to the other, is very solemn and surprising.'<sup>84</sup> He attracted huge crowds in larger churches, as well as open fields, the laity hanging on the rails of organ lofts and climbing the leads of the church, as Edward Ninde contends in his biography of Whitefield. The preacher truly owned the status of a

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<sup>82</sup> Horace Walpole, letter to John Chute, 10 October 1766; John Nelson, *An Extract from the Journal of Mr John Nelson: To Which is Added, A Brief Memoir of His Life and Death* (Liverpool, 1807), in Knox, *Enthusiasm*, p.513.

<sup>83</sup> George Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journal: A New Edition Containing Fuller Material than any Hitherto Published* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 4 April 1739, p.244, 18 March 1739, p.234.

<sup>84</sup> Whitefield, *Journal*, 18 March 1739, p.235.

dazzling celebrity, unable even to walk to his sermons for fear of overbearing crowds singing his, and God's, praises.<sup>85</sup>

Amidst this strong revival fervour, preachers like Wesley and Whitefield became unscrupulously persuasive, creating an abnormal atmosphere in which converts would fall to the ground crying out their feelings in enthusiastic prayer. They even encouraged their followers to transgress into religious fever in order that they should save them, and in doing so, demonstrate the power of God. Although he later renounced enthusiasm, Wesley's initial invocation of its power is clear from the numerous testimonies of converted believers recited in his journals. A 1739 entry proudly records how a weaver named John Haydon had fallen into an enthusiastic stupor upon reading Wesley's sermon, 'Salvation by Faith' (1738). 'In reading the last page,' Wesley announces, 'he changed colour, fell off his chair, and began screaming terribly, and beating himself against the ground . . . I came in [and he] fixed his eyes upon me [and] roared out, 'O thou devil! thou cursed devil! yea, thou legion of devils!' After praying for Haydon, Wesley notes that his 'pangs ceased, and both his body and soul were set at liberty,' an observation that accords with Hume's notion of enthusiasm as emancipatory.<sup>86</sup> Wesley thus primarily considered enthusiasm able to unleash the believer from sin, a sign of God's intervening power and so to be protected as a sacred emotion. As Brontë's narrator discovers in 'Why ask to know the date – the clime?' (1846), a poem I discuss in chapter three, adopting the persona of the enthusiast not only frees him from sin, but it exempts him from it, enforcing his frenzied desire for power in war.

Passionate feeling of a simple and vital nature was central to Methodist belief, and long after Wesley had dismissed enthusiasm as madness, he remained insistent that ardency of emotion forged the path to God. 'Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,' Wesley asserted, 'must be *felt* or they have no being. All therefore who condemn inward feelings in the gross, leave no place either for joy or peace or love in

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<sup>85</sup> Edward S. Ninde, *George Whitefield: Prophet-Preacher* (New York and Cincinnati: The Abingdon Press, 1924), pp.49-50.



religion, and consequently reduce it to a dry, dead, carcase [sic].'<sup>87</sup> Brontë confirms such a statement in 'A sudden chasm of ghastly light' as discussed above, the narrator's 'inward tempest' finally driving her to deliriously encounter the religious emotions evoked by the cathedral (l.20). The intense passion Brontë invokes, then, parallels that summoned by Wesley, and both were censured for procuring an enthusiasm inducive of disorder. As the critic E. P. Whipple rendered Brontë a 'spendthrift of malice and profanity' in 1848, George Lavington launched an earlier attack upon Wesley in a three part tract, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar'd* (1749-1751).<sup>88</sup> His aim was 'to draw a comparison between the wild and pernicious enthusiasms of some of the most eminent saints of the popish communion, and those of Methodists in our own country,' dismissing the latter as a 'dangerous and presumptuous sect, animated with an enthusiastical and fanatical spirit.' (I, p.i). The Methodists, argued Lavington, were nothing more than '*pretended Reformers,*' who ascribed '*every flash of zeal and devotion; every wild pretension; impulses, impressions, feelings, impetuous Transports and raptures; intoxicating vapours and fumes of Imaginations; Phantoms of a crazy brain, and uncouth effects of a distempered mind, or body*' with '*an amazing Presumption to the extraordinary interposition of Heaven setting its seal to their Mission*' (I, pp.i, 48).

As the 'blood and spirits' of such believers 'run *high,*' their 'brain and imagination' become inflamed, provoking a state of enthusiasm Lavington described as '*Religion run mad*' (*Methodists and Papists*, I, p.81). Thus the scriptures become '*a Lottery*' in which enthusiasts 'are sure of a *Prize,*' ignorant of God's message but

<sup>86</sup> John Wesley, *Journal*, II, 4 May 1739, p.191.

<sup>87</sup> John Wesley, *Journal*, V, 12 August 1771, p.426; also in Knox, *Enthusiasm*, p.537; Wesley's reply to the hypothetical question of how one knows when one is in love is similarly impassioned: 'Why, as you know whether you are hot or cold. You *feel* this moment that you do or do not love,' in *Journal*, II, 4 January 1739, p.125.

<sup>88</sup> E. P. Whipple, 'Novels of the Season,' p.63; Bishop George Lavington, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar'd* (London: J. and P. Knapton, 1749); *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared: Part II* (London: J. and P. Knapton, 1749); and *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared: Part III* (London: J. and P. Knapton, 1751); further references to these editions are given after

looking to him 'to find something peculiarly concerning *themselves*' (II, p.27).

Lavington also compared Methodism to the bite of the Tarantula as a faith that infected believers with a spirited venom, driving 'these unhappy Creatures into direct *Madness and Distractions*, either of the *moaping*, or the *raving* kind; or *both* of them, by successive *Fits*' (III, p.12). Preachers, Lavington contends, are guilty of instigating believers into: 'Shriekings, Roarings, Groanings, Tremblings, Gnashings, Yellings, Foamings, Convulsions, Swoonings, Droppings, Blasphemies, Curses, dying and despairing Agonies,' a list which mimics the most prominent verbs in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*: 'writhe, drag, crush, grind, struggle, yield, sink, recoil, outstrip, tear, drive asunder' (*Methodists and Papists III*, p.23).<sup>89</sup> Thus Wesley was damned by his critics as an enthusiast intent on ruining the Church, just as Brontë was labelled an inappropriately fierce poet, masculine and violent.

The assaults aimed at enthusiasm as a Methodist menace provoked Wesley to renounce such fervency in two open letters to Lavington written between 1750 and 1752.<sup>90</sup> Rather than defending enthusiasm, Wesley conceded Lavington's understanding of it, addressing each of his points concerning enthusiasm and then dissociating them from Methodism. In 'A Letter to the Author of the Enthusiasm of Methodists, &c.' (1750), Wesley took Lavington's indictment point by point, disproving and challenging each accusation by quoting the Bishop's text in full. Where Lavington accuses the Methodists of exacting 'the same plan' as the Papists, Wesley turns to field preaching as an instance of their democratic and anti-ritual worship (*Letter*, p.362; *Methodists and Papists*, I, p.10). Where Lavington charges Wesley with abuse of the clergy as a mark

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quotations in the text, citing the part and page number and where necessary, signified by the title *Methodists and Papists*.

<sup>89</sup> Mark Schorer lists these verbs in his introduction to *Wuthering Heights* (New York: Rinehart, 1950), p.xv, in J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p.167.

<sup>90</sup> John Wesley, 'A Letter to the Author of the Enthusiasm of Methodists &c.' [1752], in *The Works of John Wesley: The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, 26 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), XI, pp.359-376; and 'A Second Letter to the Author of the Enthusiasm of Methodists &c.' [1752], *Works of John Wesley: The Appeals*, XI, pp.377-429

of the preacher's enthusiasm, Wesley retorts that 'calumny is not enthusiasm' (*Letter*, p.363). Where Lavington berates Methodism's detachment from luxury, adornment, 'gold, or costly apparel,' Wesley emphasizes his believers' aspiration toward heaven as their most precious commodity (*Letter*, p.364; *Methodists and Papists*, I, p.21). To Lavington's remark that Wesley has expressed an 'ardent desire of going to hell,' Wesley claims that his fate lies only in the hands of God (*Letter*, p.366; *Methodists and Papists*, I, p.34). The banter continues throughout the letter, witty but implicitly contemptuous, ridiculing the Bishop who is finally advised to 'put off [his] fool's coat' and 'stand naked before cool and sober reason' (pp.375-376).

Such an ending positioned Wesley and the Methodists on the side of reason, and Lavington as a slightly deranged commentator, misquoting and anecdotal. Lavington replied in the third part of his tract, written the year after Wesley's first *Letter*, to which the preacher responded with 'A Second Letter to the Author of the Enthusiasm of Methodists, &c.' in 1752. The *Second Letter* also offered an adamant negation of Lavington's critique, but its lengthier and more solemn prose betrayed Wesley's impatience with, and ambiguous relation to, the subject. Prefaced with a note directly addressed to Lavington, the pamphlet made clear its target to the general reader. Wesley began by accusing the Bishop of making 'the most essential parts of real, experimental religion, matter of low buffoonery,' exclaiming that Lavington had stabbed 'Christianity to the heart under the colour of opposing enthusiasm' (pp.381, 383). At other points, however, the letter lacked clarity and was consistently quick to protest. Lavington, for example, arraigned Methodism for allowing a 'fierce and rancorous' spirit to subsist within its ranks, leading to the employment of '*Women and boys*' in the 'ministry of *public preaching*' (*Second Letter*, p.406; *Methodists and Papists*, II, p.126). Wesley hastily repudiated such a claim, mocking: 'Please to tell me where? I know them not, not ever heard of them before,' a betrayal of his support elsewhere for women's right to

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(pp.386-7, 389); further references to these editions are given after quotations in the text, and where necessary, signified by the respective titles, *Letter* and *Second Letter*.



# 1.

## Religious Intellectuals:

### An Introduction

This chapter outlines my argument that Brontë and Rossetti forged an intellectual identity by writing about religion. I contend that it is useful for the reader to acknowledge their references to both religious culture and theological doctrine in their poetry and prose, thus situating the two women as astute commentators upon society. Engaged with religion in a time when Christianity was in crisis, Brontë and Rossetti's writing reflects a general preoccupation with religious issues. Like Matthew Arnold and Gerard Manley Hopkins, Brontë and Rossetti struggled with religious ideas that were increasingly under attack by scientific and historical developments. Unable to claim the professional public identity Arnold and Hopkins enjoyed, Brontë and Rossetti assumed an intellectual role free from the pretensions inherent in the concept of 'the man of letters.' Both poets, the first driven by a political desire to dismantle Christian ideology, the latter concerned to prove the intensity of her faith, followed an intellectual trajectory particular to women thinkers. This trajectory allows them to question, subvert and refigure those religious values by which both poets were embraced.

The thesis overall aims to address the poets' roles as observers of religious issues by labelling them 'religious intellectuals.' Chapter one, then, examines precisely what I mean by this term with reference to both nineteenth-century and current conceptions of the intellectual. Part I, 'The Religious Intellectual,' outlines my definition of this phrase with regard to both nineteenth-century notions of the intellectual as conceived by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Stuart Mill; and current formations of the intellectual suggested by Gertrude Himmelfarb, T. W. Heyck, Stefan Collini, Edward Said and Antonio Gramsci. Part II, 'Emily Brontë,' suggests that criticism's consideration of Brontë as either a mystic or Romantic ignores the poet's location in a specifically

preach which would have confirmed Brontë's suspicions concerning the hypocrisy inherent to Methodism (*Second Letter*, p.406). Contradictions like this undermined the reliability of Wesley's prose, which both deteriorated into a whining disbelief at Lavington's capacity to 'vilify and blacken' the Methodists, and slyly turned on Catholicism as a scapegoat. The reply – 'The Bishop of Exeter's Answer to Mr. J. Wesley's Late Letter to his Lordship' – recognized the *Second Letter's* ranting and peevish mode, and Wesley was impelled to conceive a sermon on enthusiasm to elucidate his views.

'The Nature of Enthusiasm' (1750) attempted to clear the Methodists from the charge of enthusiasm, defining it as a 'disorder of the mind' which 'not only dims but shuts the eyes of the understanding.'<sup>91</sup> Wesley admitted the term could be taken in a 'good sense, for a divine impulse or impression superior to all the natural faculties,' a meaning which cast 'the prophets of old and the apostles' as 'proper "enthusiasts"' (p.48). So too do others, Wesley claimed, 'take the word in an indifferent sense' as neither 'morally good nor evil,' a group including 'the poets, of Homer and Virgil in particular' (p.49). The indifferent enthusiasts have in their 'temper a strong tincture of enthusiasm,' according to the preacher, through which they 'understand an uncommon vigour of thought, a peculiar fervour of spirit, a vivacity and strength not be found in common men' (p.49). Enthusiasts, then, if prophets, apostles and poets, were to be honoured, and yet Wesley was clear that the 'generality of men, if no farther agreed, at least agree thus far concerning it, that it is something evil,' a 'misfortune, if not a fault' (p.49). A kind of overdose of religion, enthusiasm was thought to lead the believer into a chaotic condition wherein she assumed an elevated state imagining 'what [s]he is not,' and thus mocking God's divine authority. For the enthusiastic narrator of 'How clear she shines! How quietly' (1843), this involves replacing God with a fanciful feeling, a manoeuvre which causes reason to fall prey to madness. Wesley thus understood the

nature of enthusiasm as ‘a species of madness’ rather ‘than of folly’ (*Enthusiasm*, p.49). While the fool simply derived ‘wrong conclusions’ from the ‘right premises’ (neglecting God but knowing her fatuity), the mad enthusiast drew ‘right conclusions’ from the ‘wrong premises,’ owning a fervent belief in God within a state of extreme and dangerous frenzy (p.49).

The enthusiast, then, believed strongly in the tenets of Christianity, but for Wesley, flagrantly rejected them, a sentiment which relates to Brontë’s attraction to an enthusiasm stripped of its religious frame. As the preacher asserted: ‘Every enthusiast then is properly a madman. Yet his is not an ordinary, but a religious madness’ (*Enthusiasm*, p.50). Wesley was careful in his conflation of religion, the ‘spirit of a sound mind,’ with madness, arguing that, where the two were associated, it was madness that took ‘religion for its object’ (p.50). The enthusiast might talk ‘of religion, of God or of the things of God,’ but his manner would reveal to ‘every reasonable Christian’ the ‘disorder of his mind’ (p.50). Reminding the reader that ‘innumerable sorts of enthusiasm’ subsist, Wesley pinpoints three types ‘which are most common, and for that reason most dangerous’ (p.50). The ‘first sort of enthusiasm’ groups ‘those who imagine they have the *grace* which they have not,’ namely, individuals claiming redemption without repenting (p.50). Such believers ‘only deceive their own souls,’ imagining ‘themselves to have faith in Christ’ when they have none and so ‘as wide of truth and soberness as that of the ordinary madman’ (p.51). The group includes the ‘fiery zealot,’ deranged and ‘distempered,’ as well as those who live Christian lives and follow “‘Christian modes of worship,’” but fail to feel ‘real, inward holiness’ (p.52). Brontë’s A. G. A. accords with the characteristics of this first kind of enthusiast, grasping for redemption in ‘Were they Shepherds, who sat all day’ (1841-44). Although aware that she has “‘wrongs to pay,’” A. G. A. refuses to repent, however, even in death

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<sup>91</sup> John Wesley, ‘Sermon 37: The Nature of Enthusiasm’ [1750], in *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons II: 34-70*, ed. Albert C. Outler, 26 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), II, pp.44-60; further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text, and where necessary, signified by the title *Enthusiasm*.



remaining dependent on the intense feeling enthusiasm offers, but indifferent to God (l.228).

Wesley's 'second sort of enthusiasm' gathers those 'who imagine they have such *gifts* from God as they have not,' believing themselves to own 'a power of working miracles, of healing the sick [ . . . ] restoring sight to the blind; yea, even of raising the dead' (*Enthusiasm*, p.52). Such enthusiasts feel themselves 'directed by the Spirit when they are not,' experiencing 'visions or dreams' and misled by inflamed imaginations to ascribe their thoughts to God (pp.53-54). 'Of old times,' Wesley concedes, God used visions and dreams to manifest his will, a technique now rare, passé and to be rejected for sober good actions and works (p.54). Brontë's soldier in 'Why ask to know the date – the clime?' performs this second type of enthusiasm, deceived by an enthusiastic desire for power which has fatal effects. The 'third very common sort of enthusiasm' Wesley discusses includes those who claim to understand God's word without inquiring into it, thinking 'to attain the end without using the means' (p.56). These enthusiasts 'expect to understand the Holy Scriptures without reading them and meditating thereon,' conversing upon theological subjects while lacking the proper premeditation (p.56). From this third group, Wesley moves to a possible fourth kind of enthusiasm wherein the believer considers himself the "peculiar favourite of heaven" (p.57). This last classification is almost excused within the sermon, Wesley reminding his laity that God's providence falls upon all in the universe, his judgements and preferences unpredictable to the mortal believer (p.57). To feel distinguished in God's eyes is to suffer from pride, however, part of 'that many-headed monster, enthusiasm!' and driving 'men of education and learning' to assume an understanding of 'this dark, ambiguous word' (p.58). The arrogant judges in Brontë's 'Listen! when your hair like mine' (1844) suffer from such enthusiasm, preaching Christian values to the accused Julius Brenzaida before throwing him into a 'dungeon damp' (l.36). It is better, Wesley suggests, to 'never fancy yourself a believer in Christ, till Christ is revealed in you,' avoiding the

title 'Christian' until 'you have the mind which was in Christ, and walk as he also walked' (p.59).

Assuming grace, special gifts and intellectual insight, enthusiasts appeared as false pretenders to God's favour in Wesley's sermon, seemingly condemned outright. The final lines of the discourse, however, grant that this 'pure and holy religion' called 'enthusiasm' will remain, almost necessarily, to embrace those non-conforming disciples of the Christian God (*Enthusiasm*, p.60). Caught in an enlightenment desire to rationalize God's word, writing on electricity and natural science to underline Methodism's place in contemporary culture, Wesley still had to concede the influence of enthusiasm within the revival. To 'renounce reason is to renounce religion' Wesley affirmed, and yet his sermons and letters on enthusiasm portray the subject as one of unusual interest.<sup>92</sup> For Brontë, accounted as disregarding religious belief, unwilling to teach at Sunday School and standing dispassionate and impatient in Church, enthusiasm proved one of the few fascinating elements of the Methodist atmosphere that crowded her environment. Possibly liberatory, perhaps a mark of depravity, enthusiasm attracted the poet as an outlet for passionate feeling that resulted, she read in Wesley's works, in madness.

Brontë encountered these works in three ways: through her father's preaching texts; Haworth's circulating library; and a collection of books held at Ponden House which the Heatons allowed the Brontë children to use.<sup>93</sup> As Marianne Thormählen states, Brontë's 'reading of devotional literature was extensive and varied,' and she was 'used to taking part in advanced discussions of religious matters.'<sup>94</sup> Research by Katherine M. Sorensen also underlines Brontë's knowledge of Wesley's writing, tracing the story of Heathcliff's death in *Wuthering Heights* to a 1750 entry in the preacher's

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<sup>92</sup> John Wesley, letter to Dr. Thomas Rutherford, 28 March 1768, in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p.52.

<sup>93</sup> Chitham, *A Life*, p.67.

<sup>94</sup> Marianne Thormählen suggests that the Brontës knew the spiritual guide *Christian Instructions* by William Morgan and argues that '*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and *Fraser's Magazine* were obvious transmitters of contemporary views on theological matters,' in *The Brontës and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.48-49.

journal.<sup>95</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> June 1750, Wesley recorded a strange tale told to him by an old Irishman while travelling through Ireland. The story recalls the experiences of the Irishman's now deceased son, John Dudley, an unusually religious man who, after the death of his mother, felt also close to death and thus 'gave himself wholly to prayer, laying aside all worldly business' (p.480). After seeing visions of his mother in heaven, Dudley stated his wish to be buried next to his mother, still lacking any sign of physical illness, yet crying and sweating 'through the agony of his spirit' (p.481). Refusing food, Dudley was finally bestowed with a visitation from the Holy Ghost and so continued to pray fervently until the next morning, upon which he ventured out never to return. The narrating father, Wesley remembers, recalls how he found him later that day: 'lying in the grass, stretched out at length, with his face upward; his right hand was lifted up toward heaven, his left stretched upon his body; his eyes were closed, and he had a sweet, pleasant, smiling countenance.' Oddly, the father confesses, the body 'had no hurt or scratch from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot; nor one speck of dirt on any part of his body, no more than if it had just been washed (p.481).

Brontë's portrait of Heathcliff's death provides a conspicuous parallel to the tale, the dying Byronic hero mourning the death of Catherine so intensely that it would appear she had died only minutes before.<sup>96</sup> Heathcliff is possessed by the sense of Catherine's presence as Dudley is with his mother's, telling Nelly that while he feels in health and wishes to live, the spectre of Catherine draws him near to death. 'I have to remind myself to breathe,' he cries, 'almost to remind my heart to beat!' (WH, p.321). Shunning the rest of the house at meals, often abruptly 'excited, and wild, and glad,' Heathcliff finally leaves to go night-walking, wishing to be free from the shadow of the 'strange change' approaching him (pp.324, 320). On his return, the 'change,' a phrase also used by Methodists to designate religious conversion, has occurred and Heathcliff

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<sup>95</sup> John Wesley, *Journal*, III, 24 June 1750, pp.480-481, in Katherine M. Sorensen, 'From Religious Ecstasy to Romantic Fulfilment: John Wesley's *Journal* and the Death of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*,' *Victorian Newsletter*, 82 (1992), 1-5 (p.1); further references to Wesley's journal entry are given after quotations in the text.



declares: 'Last night, I was on the threshold of hell. To-day, I am within sight of my heaven' (p.325). He remains, 'too happy and yet not happy enough,' trapped by flitting visions of Catherine and insisting that he must be buried next to her (p.330). Nelly finds him dead the next morning, 'laid on his back [ . . . ] perfectly still [ . . . ] no blood trickl[ing] from the broken skin,' frozen in her gaze with his eyes glaring and his body washed clean by the rain (p.332).

The connecting points between Wesley's tale and Brontë's narration are apparent as Sorensen argues. Both Dudley and Heathcliff are in good health, sense their impending deaths and are obsessed with visions of the dead women they wish to join. Each pray with disturbing fervency, refuse to eat, are strangely cheerful and wander out after dark, passing away the next morning and leaving no sign of their cause of death. Sorensen indicates that even the differences between the two are direct opposites instead of simple anomalies, implying Brontë's referential technique.<sup>97</sup> Dudley is associated with religion, begs God to pity his family and dies with his eyes closed, a gentle smile across his lips. Heathcliff is compared with Satan, curses his family and expires with a sneering grin and terrifying wide eyes. From such links, Sorensen concludes that Brontë gives 'Heathcliff a death modelled on that of a devout Methodist,' implying that his 'passion for Catherine is religious.'<sup>98</sup> The association of 'religious ecstasy with sexual passion,' Sorensen argues, serves to emphasize the 'ultimate authority of feeling,' the signature of the Methodist faith.<sup>99</sup> Catherine and Heathcliff, then, demonstrate 'that religious feeling can exist without doctrine,' a factor unnecessary 'for the reality of Methodism' and substituted by 'truth of feeling,' a form of enthusiasm.<sup>100</sup> Spiritual reality can be found, Sorensen reasons from her research, not in an otherworldly realm, but in 'the world around us properly and passionately felt,' evidenced 'by those two

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<sup>96</sup> Sorensen, 'Religious Ecstasy,' pp.1-2.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid*, p.2.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid*, p.2.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid*, p.2.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid*, p.4.

ghosts walking at the end of the novel.’<sup>101</sup> The bond between these two lovers is more than a simply religious one, of course, and yet Sorensen’s argument is invaluable in the connections it makes between Brontë and Wesley’s writing.<sup>102</sup> Her suggestion that Heathcliff suffers from a kind of demented conversion experience connects enthusiasm to madness, the subject that dominates the final pages of this chapter.

Heathcliff and Catherine, successors to Brontë’s poetical narrators, are both ‘enthusiasts’ as defined in Wesley’s sermon, ‘The Nature of Enthusiasm,’ the former transgressive of the Methodist role, and the latter repeatedly described as mad. Heathcliff’s conduct warrants his membership in Wesley’s three main groups of enthusiasts, as he assumes, first, a profanely divine state of union with Catherine; second, a claim upon magical gifts in his visionary communications with Catherine beyond the grave; and third the right to reject scripture, frowning upon others’ references to it. As young Cathy exclaims: ‘Mr. Heathcliff never reads; so he took it into his head to destroy my books [ . . . ] Only once, I searched through Joseph’s store of theology, to his great irritation’ (WH, p.298). The narrator of ‘No coward soul is mine’ precedes Heathcliff here in that she too rejects orthodox religion for visions and dreams, dismissive of its ‘vain creeds’ and invested in the ‘God within’ her ‘breast’ (ll.9, 5). Defiant of death, destruction and the restrictions of mortal life, the power within the narrator recalls the enthusiastic feeling of the Methodist, granting her narration, like Heathcliff’s, a frightening intensity. Catherine’s enthusiasm is similarly vehement, and yet its representation is marked by madness. She confesses to Nelly that her ‘dreams appal’ her and speaks of being enclosed within a prison-like oak bed, ‘swallowed in a paroxysm of despair’ (WH, p.124). She cries: ‘Oh, I’m burning! I wish I were out of doors - I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free . . . and laughing at injuries, not maddening

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid*, p.4.

<sup>102</sup> Davies too addresses the ‘bizarre religious joy which characterizes *Wuthering Heights* - a joy in the pure mania of religious fanaticism,’ ideas Brontë inherited directly from Wesley, in *Emily Brontë*, 1988, p.126.

under them!’ (p.124). Nelly too notes the ‘maniac fury’ that kindles under Catherine’s ‘brows’ and Heathcliff castigates her as she lies dying, screaming: ‘Don’t torture me till I’m as mad as yourself’ (pp.127, 158).<sup>103</sup>

Catherine’s ardour lies at the centre of a novel intent on overturning societal preconceptions of normality, positioning enthusiasm and extremity of feeling as natural behaviour. It is Lockwood’s polite middle-class delicacy that appears peculiar and foreign, and not the fervent expressions of the other characters. The stranger’s middle-class London background prohibits him from understanding the Heights in the same way as those who dwell there: he misreads a pile of dead rabbits as a cluster of pet cats curled up over one another, and is shocked at the household’s lack of ‘polite’ manners.<sup>104</sup> Lockwood’s conduct warrants strong reproach, as he looks down on Yorkshire custom, taunts the dogs until they attack him, and spies into Catherine’s diary, leafing through both her hand-written thoughts and the enclosed pamphlet. The pamphlet is a sermon on Matthew 18, wherein Peter asks Christ how ‘oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times seven?’ to which Jesus answers, ‘I say not unto thee, Until seven times but, seventy times seven’ (18. 21-22). Bearing the name Jabes Branderham, the sermon’s preacher recalls either Jabez Burns, the prolific Baptist minister and

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<sup>103</sup> Brontë, like Catherine, found it impossible to relinquish control in her own life, and Chitham describes her as an eruptive personality whose adult reservation was a far remove from her gregarious childhood self. Elizabeth Brontë’s godmother, Elizabeth Firth, recorded in her diary the frequent visits of the Brontës to the house she lived in with her father at Kipping, dispelling the myth that the children were sheltered and hidden away from an early age. Patrick seems to have encouraged his favourite daughter’s strength of spirit, allowing her to shoot with him, and often separating her from the others as a more competent individual. The famous incident of 1824, wherein Patrick put on old mask on each of his children to ‘make them speak with less timidity,’ sees Brontë again treated differently from her siblings. Patrick later confessed to Mrs Gaskell: ‘I told them all to stand and speak boldly from under the cover of the mask,’ posing to each a question about themselves, bar Emily who was asked, ‘what I had best do with her brother Branwell, who was sometimes a naughty boy?’ Brontë’s answer: ‘Reason with him, and when he won’t listen to reason, whip him,’ betrays a six-year old child perhaps envious of her brother, but firm in her conclusions that control is paramount, in Gaskell, *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p.47; see also Chitham, *A Life*, pp.27-29; Denis Donoghue also suggests that Brontë deemed her self the only subject on which she was equipped to comment, see ‘Emily Brontë: The Latitude of Interpretation,’ in Winnifrith, *Critical Essays*, pp.77-89 (p.82).

<sup>104</sup> Pauline Nestor also notes that Lockwood’s ‘desire to dine at five is a legacy of his fashionable southern lifestyle, which is at odds with the habits of the rural community into which he has come, and which provides another indication of his outsider status,’ in *WH*, p.338fn1.



temperance pioneer, or, as most critics suggest, Jabez Bunting.<sup>105</sup> In reading Bunting's sermons, I have not found an address to these particular verses, although he was notoriously averse to their publication, and Brontë is more likely to have encountered them in Wesley's works.<sup>106</sup> Brontë presents the verse ironically in that there is no forgiveness of any degree apparent in Branderham's dogmatic tone, reflective of Bunting's own preaching style: pedantic, overbearing and brusque. As Bunting confessed in the 'Advertisement' to one of his few published sermons, 'Justification by Faith' (1813): 'To some readers it may probably appear, that the following Discourse is too *doctrinal*; that it dwells on several minute and unessential distinctions; and that it is not sufficiently adapted to personal and popular use.'<sup>107</sup> Bunting too apologizes for his 'very brief and cursory' manner, further evoking the thundering yet laconic Branderham.

Lockwood dreams that he attends Branderham's sermon at a chapel occupied by 'a full and attentive congregation,' frozen in awe of the preacher who (in a manner reminiscent of Grimshaw) reels off four hundred and ninety sins and 'odd transgressions' (WH, p.23). The intruder pinches and pricks himself in order to bear the tedium but cannot sustain his patience, standing up and accusing Branderham of committing the four hundred and ninety first sin through the length of his pious sermon, calling for his fellow congregates to 'drag him down, and crush him to atoms' (p.24). Branderham retorts that it is Lockwood's contorted expressions of irritation and

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<sup>105</sup> Thormählen contends that Jabez Branderham recalls the Baptist minister rather than the Methodist leader, his surname 'semantically closer to "Branderham" than "Bunting," and the plethora of sermons associated with [Burns] makes it more natural to think of him in connexion with the 490 pulpit addresses endured by Lockwood than of the hard-fisted Methodist administrator,' in *Brontës and Religion*, p.18.

<sup>106</sup> Wesley comments upon these specific verses, in 'Sermon 23: Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Third' [1739-1746], in *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons I: 1-33*, ed. Albert C. Outler, 26 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), I, pp.510-530 (p.529); 'Sermon 24: Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Fourth' [1739-1746], in *Works of John Wesley: Sermons I, I*, pp.531-549 (p.547); and 'Sermon 86: A Call to Backsliders' [1788], in *Works of John Wesley: Sermons III, III*, pp.210-226; for Bunting's sermons see W. L. Thornton's two volume edition of fifty-three sermons, *Sermons By Jabez Bunting D. D.*, 2 vols (London: John Mason, 1861-1862), in which Matthew is discussed in depth in only two sermons appearing within Volume I: 'The Leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees: Part I,' pp.404-413; and 'The Leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees: Part II,' pp.414-421.

boredom that constitute this sin, and the new culprit is turned upon by the laity with clubs and staves until the noise awakes him from the nightmare. Even as Catherine's books and pamphlets fling the 'bored and weak' Londoner into the visionary realm of the Heights, Lockwood is still unable to comprehend the savagery of feeling inherent to his new environment.<sup>108</sup> Waking from his dream to see the ghost of Catherine as a child, he can only perform violence and not feel it: 'I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes (p.25). As the child wails in pain and emotional distress, Lockwood blackmails the ghost, lying that he will let her in once she releases her grip. While Heathcliff's violence is extreme and Catherine's emotion wild, Lockwood's behaviour remains the most vicious of the book, conspicuously cruel rather than intense and fiery.

Brontë's portraits of crazed conduct in both her poetry and *Wuthering Heights*, then, serve to make the reader uncomfortable rather than thrilled, a response to enthusiasm as a delirious form of madness. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Roy Porter argues, madness had been 'shorn of its earlier prestigious associations with freedom, prophecy, ecstasy, and poetic genius' and was increasingly viewed as an illness from which anyone could suffer, regardless of status.<sup>109</sup> This development had implications for the believer who expressed her faith through enthusiastic fits of prayer deemed pathological by orthodox Christianity. Charismatic states such as 'speaking with tongues,' deemed signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit by the early Apostles, had come to seem merely symptomatic of derangement by the eighteenth century.<sup>110</sup> For Brontë's readership George III's madness, the opening of the York Retreat, the advocacy of 'moral therapy,' the Criminal Lunatics' Act of 1800, the

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<sup>107</sup> Jabez Bunting, 'Advertisement,' *Justification By Faith: A Sermon Preached in Albion-Street Chapel, at Leeds and Published at the Request of the Methodist Conference Then Assembled in That Town* (Leeds: Leak and Nichols, 1813), pp.3-4 (p.3).

<sup>108</sup> See Hillis Miller, *Disappearance*, p.169.

<sup>109</sup> Roy Porter, 'The Hunger of Imagination: Approaching Samuel Johnson's Melancholy,' in *The Anatomy of Madness: People and Ideas*, ed. W. F. Bynum, 2 vols (London and New York: Tavistock, 1985), I, pp.63-88, (p.80).

<sup>110</sup> M. A. Screech, 'Good madness in Christendom,' in *Anatomy of Madness*, I, pp.25-39 (p.25).

first significant parliamentary inquiries into madhouses in 1807 and 1815 and the passing of the 1808 Act authorising public lunatic asylums, all signified the disease.<sup>111</sup>

The historical moment marked by the above events was particularly apparent in Yorkshire, and the Brontë family encountered vivid stories of the York Asylum, and its radical replacement, the York Retreat, in newspapers and through gossip at church.<sup>112</sup> The York Asylum was opened in 1782, disappointing its supporters and patrons after the mysterious death of a Quaker inmate in 1790. The patient was Hannah Mills, a widow from Leeds admitted on 15 March on grounds of ‘melancholy,’ passing away just six weeks later on the 29 April after members of the Society of Friends had been refused visitation rights.<sup>113</sup> Isolated from any external access, Mills received no religious consolation during her last days, and the event led to anxiety and suspicion about the asylum’s conditions and practices. Accounts of chained lunatics, whipped and jeered at, manacled and stripped bare in overcrowded and abhorrent conditions quickly spread, exposing the Asylum as dehumanizing and cruel. Inquiries were initiated, and J. P. Godfrey Higgins visited the Asylum, vomiting at the sight of the cells, damp, crowded, cold and gloomy, like the cells described in Brontë’s prison-poems, discussed in chapter three.<sup>114</sup> The Scottish Lunacy Commissioner, W. A. F. Browne, also attacked the horrific conditions of York’s Asylum in a lecture entitled ‘What Asylums Were’ (1837).<sup>115</sup> Browne remarked that ‘unjustifiable confinement, unhealthy cells [and]

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<sup>111</sup> Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg’d Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* [1987] (London: Penguin, 1990), p.19; Frank E. Manuel argues that the very initiation of psychology has been read as a field rooted, not in any scientific enquiry of human nature, but within religious revivals since the seventeenth century whose supporters saw any religious experience other than rational perception as a kind of disease, in *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), p.71; for a useful collection of primary source material on madness written in this period, see Vieda Skultons, *Madness and Morals: Ideas on Insanity in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

<sup>112</sup> For references to the vast amount of newspaper and magazine literature consumed by the Brontës see Barker, *Brontës*, pp.148-150; and Thormählen, *Brontës and Religion*, pp.48ff.

<sup>113</sup> Anne Digby, *Madness, Morality and Medicine: A Study of the York Retreat 1796-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.15.

<sup>114</sup> Porter, *Manacles*, pp.3, 10.

<sup>115</sup> W. A. F. Browne, ‘What Asylums Were, Are, and Ought to Be: Being the Substance of Five Lectures Delivered Before the Managers of the Montrose Royal Lunatic Asylum’ (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1837), in *The Asylum as Utopia: W. A. F. Browne and the Mid-Century Consolidation of*



arrangements, which threaten life, or deprive it of even physical enjoyment' were the least of the Asylum's troubles (p.130). Grimmer still were the institutional records 'of systematic cruelty so extreme, that death was the consequence' (p.130). For in 'the report given to the public by the superintendents of the York institution, it at one time appeared that 221 patients had died. On investigation, the actual number was discovered to be 365' (p.130). Browne too recounted that 'patients were killed by the fury of the keepers and then reported to have died,' the real mortality numbers concealed and then burned (p.131). Records were substituted with false registers and then the entire building had been 'set fire to and nearly consumed, to the imminent danger of all its miserable inmates' (p.131).

Provoked by Mills' death and the ensuing scandal, the York Quaker, William Tuke, proposed his own organisation named the 'York Retreat,' funded by the Quaker community and admitting the first patients in 1796.<sup>116</sup> Designed to care for the relatives of Quakers struck down by insanity as a God-given trial, the level of care and hospitality was recognized, as Anne Digby writes, as part of the 'general Quaker view that a life is one's testimony' and patients were encouraged to adopt normal patterns of life as equal, but different, partners of the sane.<sup>117</sup> The Retreat became an exemplary institution, clean, well-managed and free of the usual asylum regimes of restraint. Tuke treated the inmates gently, having them put on their best clothes before having tea with the superintendent and his family, and nursing them back to his idea of sanity.<sup>118</sup> Yet Tuke's methods punished the individual who strayed from orthodox rationality, leaving little room for the expression of divergent behaviour, and perpetuating the idea that the mad must remain confined.<sup>119</sup>

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*Psychiatry*, ed. Andrew Scull (London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1991), pp.1-240; references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>116</sup> Digby, *York Retreat*, pp.16-17.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid*, p.27.

<sup>118</sup> In Samuel Tuke, *A Description of the Retreat, an Institution in York* (1813), in Porter, *Manacles*, p.223.

<sup>119</sup> Porter, *Manacles*, pp.225, 227; the Retreat was ultimately influential in the development of moral therapy and reformed mental health care, paving the way for progressive county asylums subject to inspection and supervision, see Scull, *Asylum as Utopia*, pp.xxx, xxxix.

For Brontë, it was this very confinement that furthered madness, however, Cathy desperate to free herself from the restraints of her sick-bed by opening the window onto the heath, as her poetical narrators strive to break from their prisons. Such madness was spurred by religion because it functioned like a prison, constraining, prescriptive and dogmatic. Wesley's commentary upon madness in 'The Nature of Enthusiasm' too recognized its oppressive meaning, and yet was unable to confront the association of frenzy with faith. Thus his *Primitive Physick: Or, An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (1747) offered supposed medical remedies to those suffering from 'lunacy' and 'raging madness' such as that Heathcliff and Cathy display.<sup>120</sup> For lunacy, Wesley recommended: a 'decoction of *Agrimony* four times a day'; an ointment consisting of '*Vinegar*, in which *Ground-Ivy Leaves* have been infused' to be rubbed on 'the Head Several Times a Day'; and the 'Juice of *Ground-Ivy* with *Sweet oil* and *white Wine*' anointed onto the sufferer's shaved head (CXXXVII, 436-438, p.80). 'Raging madness' should be treated chiefly through applying 'to the Head Cloths dipt in cold Water,' setting 'the Patient with his Head under a great *Water-fall*, as long as his Strength will bear' and restricting him to a diet of 'Apples for a Month' (CXXXVIII, 439-441, pp.80-81). The 'Raging Fit' can be cured by boiling '*Onions* in *Wine* and *Sallad [sic] Oil*' into a 'Poultis' to be applied on the back and groin, extreme cases requiring a 'Clyster with Oil of *Turpentine*' (CC, 609-610, p.102). All madness, Wesley concludes, is best treated through 'cold-bathing' and 'Water-Drinking,' cures to which a final section is appended at the end of the pamphlet (p.122).<sup>121</sup>

Wesley's positioning of lunacy and raging madness in an alphabetized list of illnesses, from itching and asthma to breast cancer and dropsy, then, conveys the preacher's conception of madness as a physical condition. The dictionary-like catalogue

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<sup>120</sup> John Wesley, *Primitive Physick: Or, An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* [1747], 5<sup>th</sup> edn (Bristol: J. Palmer, 1755); further references to Wesley's journal entry are given after quotations in the text, citing the section, sub-section and page numbers, and where necessary, signified by the title *Physick*.

<sup>121</sup> Porter contends that one of Wesley's cures for madness is to tie the patient up, *Manacles*, pp.12, 30; it is clear in *Primitive Physick*, however, that this is *not* Wesley's suggestion, but a standardized cure quoted from a 'Dr. Mead' in a footnote following the section on 'Raging Madness' (CXXXVIII, p.80fn.w).

of cures Wesley offered was presented as an addendum to a shorter section on healthy living, however, advising the reader to get enough rest, drink lots of water and so on. Paramount in this primary part of the pamphlet was the notion that the reader should ‘add to’ any selected cure, ‘that Old, Unfashionable Medicine, PRAYER,’ marking Wesley’s belief that well-being was founded upon a healthy mind (*Physick*, p.xv). He was thus caught within the orthodox Christian tradition as an observer of madness, deeming it a curable ailment, but one still threatening to belief. Enthusiastic madness was capable of leading faith into exaggeration and dementia, as Wesley was aware, recommending as he does a temperate regime of prayer as inherent to sanity. Brontë’s complaint about organized religion of the kind Wesley could not free himself from would seem to be that it dictated to the individual the point of rest between despairing ‘unbelief’ and demented ‘belief’ that, for the poet, could only be found from the depth of experience. I argue that her difficulty, however, lay in her incapacity to find such a point of rest, since her intellectual nature strove to reject the very basis of its existence: the religious ideas surrounding her father’s background and her own.

Brontë thus envisioned the whole world as enthusiastic and so mad, a nightmarish abyss that is exemplified in *The Butterfly* (1842), a short prose piece written for her Brussels translation classes.<sup>122</sup> The essay was a response to readings set by Hégér from the naturalists Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon, François-René de Chateaubriand and Alphonse de Lamartine, who associated nature with God’s goodness and divinity.<sup>123</sup> As

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<sup>122</sup> Emily Jane Brontë, ‘The Butterfly/Le Papillon’ [11 August 1842], *The Belgian Essays: A Critical Edition*, ed. Sue Lonoff (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp.176-178 (p.178); further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text by the line number, as in Lonoff’s edition.

<sup>123</sup> See Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon, *Discours sur le style* [1753] (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1875), *Natural History: General and Particular by the Count de Buffon*, ed. and trans. William Smellie, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Stahan and Cadell, 1785), *Oeuvres complètes Volume 18: Histoire naturelle: Mammifères Volume 3* (Paris: Verdière et Ladrangé, 1824); François-René de Chateaubriand, *The Beauties of Christianity*, trans. Frederick Shoberl (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1815), *The Genius of Christianity; or, The Spirit and Beauty of the Christian Religion*, trans. Charles I. White (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1856), *Les Martyrs; ou, Le Triomphe de la religion chrétienne* (Paris: Garnier Frères, n.d.); Alphonse de Lamartine, *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* (Paris: Hachette, 1897), *Oeuvres poétiques complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), in Lonoff, p.188; see also Barbara Munson Goff, ‘Between Natural Theology and



Sue Lonoff suggests, such ideas of nature would have seemed idealistic and sentimental to Brontë, who, 'like many evangelical and dissenting Christians [ . . . ] held to a harsher mythos of creation.'<sup>124</sup> *The Butterfly* thus examines the paradox of a natural world, destructive and essentially impaired and inhabited by men who can only torment, kill, devour, suffer and finally die (l.30). Soliloquizing that all living beings are 'the tireless instrument of death to others,' the narrator puzzles over why 'we praise God for having entered such a world' where 'all creation is equally mad' (ll.22-24, 17). Catching sight of a beautiful flower, the narrator uncovers an ugly caterpillar that has eaten away the petals it is embedded within, proving the horror and delusion of the world (ll.25-26). The universe seems suddenly horrific, 'a vast machine constructed only to produce evil' embracing a world that 'should have been destroyed' (ll.35-39). Yet, as a shining purple and gold butterfly flits past her eyes like an 'angel sent from heaven,' the narrator concludes that beauty must come from ugliness, and thus happiness from torment (l.40). God is reconstituted as merciful and just, his actions the seeds of an ultimate 'divine harvest' wherein death and sin will perish and 'leave their ancient victims to an eternal empire of happiness and glory' (l.52-58).

Suffering, it seems, brings salvation, death being necessary to the vivacity of the natural world, a tenet somewhere between the grave-yard poets' morbidity and the Romantics' love of nature. Brontë, like her wrathful but just God, owned a vehement sense of nature's cruelty, moralising to her sisters and to Charlotte's friend Ellen Nussey upon the necessity of the strong dominating the weak. Brontë's philosophy of existence must flow along a current of destruction so that one being's death enables the survival of another, nature remaining, as Hillis Miller describes it, like a 'patternless maze created by a madman.'<sup>125</sup> This sense of turbulence marks Brontë's philosophy, her notion of the inexplicable problem of nature resembling the lament of the early-modern writer, Robert

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Natural Selection: Breeding the Human Animal in *Wuthering Heights*,' *Victorian Studies*, 27:4 (1984), pp.477-508.

<sup>124</sup> Lonoff, *Belgian Essays*, p.189.

<sup>125</sup> Hillis Miller, *Disappearance*, p.164.

Burton, that 'the world itself is a maze, a labyrinth of errors.'<sup>126</sup> Relevant too is the intersection between the portrayal of nature in *The Butterfly* and Wesley sermon 'The General Deliverance' (1781).<sup>127</sup> The preacher's declaration that 'savage fierceness' and 'unrelenting cruelty are invariably observed in thousands of creatures; yea, is inseparable from their natures!' directly intimates Brontë's construction of all life as relentless instruments of death.<sup>128</sup>

Of central importance to Brontë is Wesley's question in this sermon: 'Is it only the lion, the tiger, the wolf among the inhabitants of the forests and plains,- the shark and a few more voracious monsters, among the inhabitants of the waters,- or the eagle among birds,- that tears the flesh, sucks the blood, and crushes the bones of their helpless fellow-creatures?' (p.443). His conclusion, 'Nay; the harmless fly, the laborious ant, the painted butterfly are treated in the same merciless manner,' could even have provoked Brontë's focus upon the butterfly (p.443). The butterfly seems also pivotal here because it is a creature that changes its very shape, complicating the relationship between the unsightly and the comely as Brontë merges reason with the illogical at the end of the essay. For if God's actions, 'rational or irrational,' add up to the same thing, then Brontë may place the idea of reason itself on an equal level with madness and delirium. It is thus easy to see how Brontë may have at once rendered

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<sup>126</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* [1621], ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1927), p.237; space does not permit me to discuss Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which Brontë read in an 1827 edition published by John Bumpus and residing today in the Brontë Parsonage Museum Library. I would note, however, that her reclamation of enthusiasm may be read as a reaction to the censure of the imagination Burton proposed within his study of melancholy. For Burton, melancholy's victims, rendered as 'Enthusiasticks and desperate persons,' suffer from 'too much devotion, blind zeal, fear of eternal punishment, and that last judgement' (*Anatomy*), p.867. The melancholic, then, shared many of the traits the religious enthusiast was accused of a century later. Burton contended that melancholy had the capacity to spread to anyone who over-indulged in a particular activity: seers, heretics and pseudo-prophets could all drown in its 'stupend, vast, infinite Ocean of incredible madness and folly' (*Anatomy*, p.868). Like Freud, who later invoked the sea as a spiritual, but non-Christian, oceanic feeling, Burton too, in a more troubled manner, associated the sea with the melancholy rejection of orthodox religion, see Sigmund Freud, 'Civilization and its Discontents' [1930], *Civilization, Society, Religion: Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents and Other Works*, 15 vols (London: Penguin Freud Library, 1991), XII, pp.251-340.

<sup>127</sup> Hillis Miller also comments upon this parallel, in *Disappearance*, pp.164-165.

<sup>128</sup> John Wesley, 'Sermon 60: The General Deliverance' [1781], in *Works of John Wesley: Sermons II*, II, pp.437-450 (p.443); further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

irrational enthusiastic feeling as part of a rational religious system, and this same system as one riddled by the delirium of enthusiasm. As a result, Brontë associates enthusiasm and Methodism with madness, all imprisoning forces as the poet illustrates in 'My Comforter' (1844) and 'A sudden chasm of ghastly light' (1837), madness signified in both poems as frenzy.

For Brontë, frenzy stood as another signifier for the imprisoning madness she believed religion provoked.<sup>129</sup> Limited, temporal and sometimes artificial, frenzy parallels enthusiasm in that it is assumed by believers intent on proving their faith, but then overpowers them.<sup>130</sup> This process is apparent within 'My Comforter,' a poem spoken by a narrator frustrated by the frenzied religious community around her, betrayed by the 'wretches uttering praise' in the poem (l.13). Such believers voice their hopeless 'howling' with 'Frenzy's tongue,' a phrase that iterates the affected nature of their prayers (l.15). Disassociated from the wailing female mystic, the believers here are locked in a 'Brotherhood of misery,' their 'smiles as sad as sighs' underlining again the feigned and laboured sense of devotion expressed (ll.16-17). Such frenzy, however, transposes itself onto the narrator like an imprisoning disease, and she states of the brotherhood that their 'madness daily maddened me, | Distorting into agony | The Bliss before my eyes' (ll.18-20). Like the enthusiast, the 'wretches' of whom she speaks hold

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<sup>129</sup> William Blackstone deems frenzy both an ephemeral and affected condition, induced both by natural causes, such as 'the change of the moon' and voluntary states, like drunkenness; see *Commentaries on the Laws of England: Of Public Wrongs* (1765-9), in Michael Donnelly, *Managing the Mind: A Study of Medical Psychology in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London and New York: Tavistock, 1983), pp.69, 71; Michel Foucault also addresses the idea of frenzy, calling it an aggravated 'melancholic predisposition,' that, once calmed, 'turns to melancholic diathesis,' in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* [1961], trans. Richard Howard (London: Tavistock, 1965), pp.111-112.

<sup>130</sup> Frenzy has much in common with fancy, that which dwindled into madness when unregulated by rationality: as Samuel Johnson remarked, 'all power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity,' in Samuel Johnson, 'The History of Rasselas Prince of Abyssinia' [1759], in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson Vol. XVI: Samuel Johnson: Rasselas and Other Tales*, ed. Gwin J. Kolb, 16 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), pp.3-176 (p.150), also in Porter, *Manacles*, p.289fn.118; the theologian and philosopher, Alexander Gerard, also claimed that fancy, 'under no control from reason,' produces 'not wild sublimity, but madness and frenzy,' *An Essay Upon Genius* (1774), in Porter, *Manacles*, pp.103-104.



an intense and disturbing faith, here so ardent that it destroys her own, confirming her sense of isolation from them.

The narrator, however, is drawn in by the enthusiastic proclamations of those who impose their religious beliefs upon her. She has a belief-system different from them, subscribing to a god-like ‘comforter’ who has, without dogma or preaching, opened her up to a ‘feeling strange or new’ (l.2). This feeling materializes, not outwardly in an enthusiastic exhibition of madness, but within, ‘Deep down – concealed within my soul,’ free from the controlling power of a tyrannical deity (ll.6, 9). Yet the enthusiastic display the Brotherhood expose her to warps the faith she has kindled, so that she becomes vulnerable to their Christian binaries, standing in both ‘Heavens glorious sun | And in the glare of Hell’ (ll.21-22). Drinking in both ‘the seraph’s song and demon’s moan’ of angels and devils, the narrator turns to her own comforter, nebulous and indefinite but still productive of enthusiastic feeling (l.25). The narrator strives towards the non-frenzied nature of her comforter, distant from the formally dictated Christian God, and yet she is bitter in the last verse that she cannot feel like those she at first resented. She even admits herself to a little madness, her ‘savage heart’ (recalling the ‘savage fierceness’ of Wesley’s world) attracted to enthusiasm, but finally calmed by the comforter for whom she sheds a ‘tear’ as a sign of her sincerity against the pretended worship of the Brotherhood (ll. 35, 37).

Where the narrator of ‘My Comforter’ is simultaneously attracted to and repelled from enthusiastic frenzy, then, the narrator of ‘A sudden chasm of ghastly light’ feels frenzy more vehemently, as I argued at the beginning of this chapter. I wish to end with the same poem to address an aspect of Brontë’s enthusiastic feeling not yet accounted for in this chapter: that of the sublime. As I contend in the next chapter, Brontë’s sublime is inflected with religious enthusiasm, the narrator of ‘A sudden chasm of ghastly light’ encountering the cathedral because of an enthusiastic feeling that propels her into the sublime. Stepping into the ‘minster-yard’ of the cathedral to view its grandeur, the narrator’s ‘frightful feeling’ of ‘frenzy born’ is accentuated, summoned by

the religious power the building represents (ll.26, 45). Her frenzied enthusiasm stimulates her senses to the point where she is able to feel the sublime, an experience that seemingly lifts the subject from an environment oppressively religious in Brontë's canon. Yet because it is enthusiasm that launches the narrator into the sublime, its impression remains religious, her escape suspended and her identity returned to its religious cage and incarcerated there. The sublime remains within a religious frame of reference here, the cathedral locking the narrator's emotions within 'its own realm of buried woe' (l.56). In lines Brontë later deleted, the cathedral darkly frowns upon her like a tyrannical God, controlling the narrator through enthusiasm, cruelly offering liberation through the sublime, but finally embracing her within its gloomy domain.<sup>131</sup>

The restrictions religion imposed on Brontë, then, are not broken by her attempt to deconstruct belief through enthusiastic madness. Her profound grasp of Methodism attests to her intellectual ability to interpret religion, particularly religious enthusiasm, but she seems beaten by the very thing she is attracted to: Methodism's validation of fierce emotional feeling. Brontë's studies of enthusiasm, however, reveal her as an important figure in theories of the sublime as the above poem conveys, and the next chapter will explore this further. Reading those verses which are spoken from, or address, the prison space, I argue that Brontë grants her narrators enthusiastic personas to launch them into a sublime feeling, so temporarily liberating them from their cells. The prison provided the poet with a powerful metaphor for religion itself, and the sublime a secular feeling to offset its dominion and yet, caught within Brontë's religious language, the sublime becomes a religious term. I illustrate, however, that, even when vanquished by Methodist ideology, Brontë remains an exemplary religious intellectual, her poetry reliant on religious culture and doctrine alike, and her interpretive use of such material intricately learned. A theory both masculinized and written about by men, the

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<sup>131</sup> Chitham and Roper note that the deleted lines, ll.48+, run as follows: <What they revealed I dared not ponder | I sprang out with a careless bound | And? stood the <<dark>> great cathedral under | Whose dark [ ] downward frowned>, *Poems*, p.43.

sublime offered Brontë a field of inquiry in which to prove her intellectual ability at the same time, I argue, as it betrayed her imprisonment within religious thought.



### The Enthusiastic Sublime and Brontë's Prison Poems

This chapter focuses on the manner in which enthusiasm shapes the quests of Brontë's poetical narrators who are emotionally elevated by enthusiasm, yet simultaneously imprisoned by the religious coding through which enthusiasm is experienced. Part I, 'Romantic Prisons and Brontë's Sublime,' suggests through the image of the prison the oppression Brontë believed religion inflicted on her society. Located within a larger tradition of Romantic prison poetry, Brontë's narrators are locked up within dungeon cells, representative of religion itself. Striving to escape such constrictions, these narrators turn to enthusiasm as an ostensibly liberating and uplifting force, but, overcome by this intense religious feeling, become crazed and delirious. Embraced within profound darkness and delirium, the narrators experience a sensation I describe as the 'enthusiastic sublime,' a category informed by the ideas of John Dennis and Edmund Burke. Trapped within a religious frame, both inside and outside the prison, this sublime feeling fails to liberate Brontë's narrators from their religious despondency. The imprisoned narrator shifts from enacting Burke's 'strong' subject, who withstands the sublime but remains imprisoned and restrained by reason, to adopting the persona of Burke's 'weak' subject, who loses herself within the sublime, driven mad in the process. Part II, 'Religion as Prison,' reads Brontë's poetry as it renders Christianity in terms of the above theories, containing three subsections which explore the themes of the enthusiastic sublime, imprisonment and the desire for liberty.

Contrary to Marianne Thormählen's recent evaluation of Brontë as an orthodox, but heroic Christian pilgrim, then, I position the poet as a thinker concerned to manipulate religious feeling within her verse.<sup>1</sup> Extracting enthusiasm from a religion

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<sup>1</sup> Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.8.

predominantly 'of the heart,' Brontë attempted to bring it into a realm, while not entirely secular, struggling against Christianity and God. Brontë's poetry exemplifies her struggle towards such a realm, but it is a place she never defines or realizes, bound as she is within her religious ideology. While the sublime, I argue, transports her narrators into a space free from earthbound Church orthodoxy, it remains a primarily religious concept for Brontë, merely confirming God's omnipotence over humanity. The sublime thus becomes an enthusiastic experience for Brontë's narrator, projecting her increasingly delirious consciousness out of the prison cell, but into a domain bound by religious values. I suggest that both earth, and that which transcends it, then, are equally oppressive for Brontë. Contrary to my argument, Stevie Davies asserts that Brontë rejected the Christian heaven for earth, however, a 'solid, stable, conclusive' realm 'refreshing her with the detailed beauty of the place where she belonged.'<sup>2</sup> For Davies, Brontë believed heaven could never be viewed as good, a violent place in which God wrathfully 'created and then rejected man, making him as violent as himself.'<sup>3</sup> Religion, and more specifically the Church, provoked 'violence and power struggle' for Brontë, Davies declares, concluding that she damned all theological systems favouring instead the perennially 'Dissenting' tradition which granted her a 'freedom of conscience.'<sup>4</sup>

Davies' heretic Brontë remains more convincing than Thormählen's faithful Brontë, the latter figure merged with her sisters as an admirer of Biblical morality and wisdom.<sup>5</sup> Yet Davies argument is problematic in that it replaces 'patriarchal Christianity' with a kind of feminine religion in which mother-earth is worshipped amidst the "'other" world' of the moors.<sup>6</sup> She also ignores the fact that Brontë's only experience of dissent was through non-conformist Christianity in Yorkshire. It is my argument that Brontë conceived of the earth *and* heaven as religious prisons, both dominated by a Christian God whose authority, barbaric but sublime, is conveyed within

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<sup>2</sup> Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (London: The Women's Press, 1994), pp.173-174.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.142.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p.141.

<sup>5</sup> Thormählen, *Brontës and Religion*, p.162.

the poems discussed below.<sup>7</sup> The irresolvable tensions inherent to the poet's work convey that Brontë never found an ideal to which she could conform. Even Catherine and Heathcliff's passion, 'a law unto themselves' claims Davies, is marked by enthusiasm and so contained within a Methodist rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> Like Catherine and Heathcliff, Brontë's poetical narrators seem mere ghostly presences, lost on earth but repelled by heaven.<sup>9</sup> As Thomas Winnifrith argues, earth is a purgatorial space Brontë's narrators suffer within before entering heaven, but, as poems like 'The Prisoner: A Fragment' (1845) depict, heaven is equally restraining, I suggest.<sup>10</sup> The poetical narrators, then, are attracted to enthusiasm as that which promises to drive them beyond the limits of religion on earth and in heaven, but find that, rooted in Methodist discourse, it serves only to fortify their incarceration. The narrators' search for autonomy beyond Christianity remains important, however, mapping a struggle from Methodist religion towards a more spiritual feeling unencumbered by religious doctrine and sublime terror.

## I Romantic Prisons and Brontë's Sublime

Brontë's poems about prisons evoke some of the darkest moments in her writing, manipulating the prison as both a theme and a place.<sup>11</sup> Her depiction of prison-spaces mimic descriptions of cells at the York Asylum and York Retreat, as I pointed out in chapter one, and, as Edward Chitham reminds us, Brontë's own living conditions. Her

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<sup>6</sup> Davies, *Heretic*, pp.172, 181; see also Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë*, Key Women Writers (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), p.126ff.

<sup>7</sup> Christ is rarely mentioned, as Thormählen also notes, Brontë more concerned to illustrate the sublime and oppressive power of the earth's Creator rather than those pawns who enable His dominion; see Thormählen, *Brontës and Religion*, pp.64-65.

<sup>8</sup> Davies, *Heretic*, p.159.

<sup>9</sup> Cathy cries: 'I was only going to say that heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy,' *WH*, p.80.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas John Winnifrith, 'Brontë's Religion,' *Critical Essays on Emily Brontë*, ed. Thomas John Winnifrith (New York: G.K. Hall, 1997), pp.8-18 (p.13).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Benvenuto comments on the darkness of those poems spoken from within the prison, stating: 'The prison is the dark night of [Brontë's] mind: it distorts reality and deranges thoughts,' in *Emily Brontë* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), pp.58-59; see also Lyn Pykett, *Emily Brontë* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp.49ff.



environment as a child, Chitham suggests, was spatially confining: the cobbled playground at the back of the Brontës' Thornton house 'prison-like'; and the cellar of Haworth Parsonage, site of the children's games, a model prison area.<sup>12</sup> The delirium that followed incarceration was widely commented upon in newspapers, magazines and literature of the time, which Brontë often read aloud to her Aunt or father.<sup>13</sup> Philip Priestly too contends that insanity was a common fear of prisoners, one inmate despairing: 'When I looked up at that appalling wall of 3,833 days, it seemed that I should never surmount it [ . . . ] I had not sufficient mastery of my thoughts at that time to keep my mind from the interminable reflections that haunt a ruined man. My fear was that I should be overtaken by madness.'<sup>14</sup> Imprisoned in 1895, Oscar Wilde wrote of himself to the Home Secretary: 'His chief danger is that of madness, his chief terror that of madness. He is conscious that his mind, shut out artificially from all rational and intellectual interests, does nothing and can do nothing.'<sup>15</sup> Like many prisoners, Wilde turned to religion, writing an aesthetico-Christian monologue, *De Profundis* (1905), a sublime confrontation with Christ to counter the sublime experience of terror madness promised. As I argue, Brontë's imprisoned narrators turn to a similar divine sublimity in their enthusiasm, and yet reject faith as a further form of constraint.

Prisons were everywhere in literature at this time too: a stock Gothic convention in novels by writers such as Ann Radcliffe, Walter Scott and Matthew Lewis, and used by the Romantics as a realm in which the inmates are heroically imprisoned in the name of revolution and freedom. Anna Barbauld, for example, attacked Samuel Rogers for basking in 'poetic dreams,' 'While dungeons burst, and despots fall' in 'Lines to Samuel

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Chitham, *A Life of Emily Brontë*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp.12, 17.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the newspapers and other reading material Brontë encountered, see Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996), pp.148-150.

<sup>14</sup> Jabez Balfour, *My Prison Life* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1901), in Philip Priestley, *Victorian Prison Lives: English Prison Biography 1830-1914* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), p.42.

<sup>15</sup> Oscar Wilde, letter to the Home Secretary, Sir Matthew Ridley, 2 July 1896, in *Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.143; also in Priestley, *Victorian Prison Lives*, p.42.

Rogers in Wales on the Eve of Bastille Day 1791' (ll.6, 8).<sup>16</sup> Coleridge's 'The Dungeon' (1797) criticized humanity itself for conceiving of a site where 'each poor brother who offends against us – ' is locked away, despite their ostensible innocence (l.2). The poem even questioned the prison's efficiency as a 'cure' for those who are guilty, a realm ruled by ignorance, corruption and cruelty (ll.5, 7, 9). Confronted only by 'savage faces,' the prisoner suffers 'friendless solitude, groaning and tears' and is finally 'Circled with evil' until his soul is eaten away (ll.13-14, 17). Only Nature can restore this 'distemper'd child,' serving to heal and harmonize his corroded soul by 'the benignant touch of Love and Beauty' (ll.21, 30).<sup>17</sup> Wordsworth's sonnet 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' (1802) also cites Nature as that which violates the prison, here an ally to the fervent Haitian leader, urged to wear 'in thy bonds a chearful brow' (l.7). L'Ouverture, confined and interrogated at the Fort-de-Joux in the French Alps until his death in 1803, becomes honourable and magnificent through his imprisonment within the poem, his punishment the reverse of his cause to emancipate the enslaved.<sup>18</sup>

Liberty was, of course, a common theme of writing composed in the revolutionary spirit of this time, and Shelley's various addresses to the subject, 'An Ode to the Assertors of Liberty' (1818) and 'Ode to Liberty' (1820) are exemplary.<sup>19</sup> 'An Ode to the Assertors of Liberty' incites the oppressed to shake their chains of slavery 'to the dust' where others now lie fallen (ll.10-11). 'Ode to Liberty' deems 'Liberty' the 'lightning of the nations,' a potent force able to release England from its own imprisoning milieu of delusion and lethargy (l.2). Such liberty was partly conceived of

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<sup>16</sup> 'Inspirers of poetic dreams | Must not now the soul enthrall | While dungeons burst, and despots fall'; see William Keach, 'Barbauld, Romanticism, and the Survival of Dissent,' *Romanticism and Gender*, ed. Anne Janowitz, Essays and Studies (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998), pp.44-61 (p.53).

<sup>17</sup> Coleridge's 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' (1797) offers the reader an alternate and ironic imprisonment of a narrator temporarily disabled from walking after an accident and so trapped within a garden-bower while his friends leave him for a few hours. His pastoral cell is enlightened by shadows 'of the leaf and stem above | Dappling' the sunshine in which he bathes and is inspired to write within, as he learns that 'Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure' keeping the senses 'Awake to Love and Beauty' (ll.50-51, 60, 64).

<sup>18</sup> For an interesting assessment of L'Ouverture as both historical and literary figure, see Cora Kaplan, 'Black Heroes/White Writers: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Literary Imagination,' *History Workshop Journal*, 46 (1998), pp.30-62.

<sup>19</sup> It is also of note that the concept of liberation is central to *Prometheus Unbound* (1820).

through the American and French Revolutions which loomed over Shelley's sense of England's political identity in the same way as Brontë invoked liberty as a release from Methodism. While the debate over revolution in France had climaxed by the time Brontë was writing, Gondal displays an engagement with it and the elapsed monarchy, a once courtly 'civil society' now at war with each other.<sup>20</sup> Themes of imprisonment and liberty loom over Gondal, and Brontë's prison poems are marked both by the Romantics' sense of despair and isolation inside the cell, and their dismay at the prison's hindrance of revolutionary activity. The former, however, dominates Brontë's poetical prisons, sites in which religious madness destroys the enclosed narrators, as I shall argue, rather than 'man-made obstacles' they can refuse and escape. The last part of this chapter will convey that Brontë's investment in liberty is always deferred to a future time, the poet unable to free herself from religion's power.<sup>21</sup>

Brontë's narrators, then, are overcome by an enthusiastic lunacy that intensifies their sense of frustration in not finding autonomy from the prison.<sup>22</sup> Thormählen

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<sup>20</sup> See Andrew McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s: Literature, Radicalism and the Public Sphere* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p.8.

<sup>21</sup> Thormählen argues that the 'most striking quality in [the Brontës] exploration of religious subject matter is its essential liberty: lives and works alike bespeak a consistent and insistent refusal to allow man-made obstacles to halt the peregrine spirit,' *Brontës and Religion*, p.7.

<sup>22</sup> The poet drew on Byron's 'The Prisoner of Chillon' (1816) as a reference point for such frustration, the inmate here overborne by a desperate sense of disappointment that liberty has failed; Roper and Chitham suggest that Brontë's directly invokes 'The Prisoner of Chillon' in 'O God of Heaven! the dream of horror' (1837), in Derek Roper and Edward Chitham, *The Poems of Emily Brontë* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.226. Disillusioned and disturbed, Byron's prisoner, Bonnivard, expresses an inability to re-engage with the world, but his fundamental discontentment is slightly different from the stark insanity many of Brontë's inmates display. Her narrators, then, both build upon and extend the idea of the prison poem into the realms of Methodist enthusiasm. The emotions they encounter while imprisoned, for example, are intensified by their enthusiasm, a mode Clement Hawes associates with 'ill-digested revolutionary trauma,' in *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.1. Rooted historically in the English Civil War, and so related both to revolution and religious non-conformism, Hawes understands such delirium as a 'manic' mode, marked by numerous features applicable to Brontë's poetry. Its concern with themes of 'socio-economic resentment' is inherent to Heathcliff's fierce hatred of the Lintons' elegant manners as it is to Gondal's concern with courtly hierarchy. The manic mode's expression of an immoderate 'blasphemous wordplay' accords with Brontë's accounts of God as a sometimes hateful being, as its blending of genres is affirmed within Brontë's poetical merging of Methodist hymnody, Yorkshire ballad and Romantic poetics, Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style*, p.9. So too does the mode defend transgressive preaching and prophecy just as A. G. A. sermonizes and predicts in her soliloquy-like narrations. The manic rhetoric's employment of self-fortifying imagery 'against persecution and martyrdom' too seems to parallel Brontë's use of prison imagery, but it is here that the poet departs from the intricacies of the mode expounded by Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style*, p.9. Brontë's narrators instead



suggests that ‘the restrictions’ against which Brontë’s narrators ‘chafe are [merely] tangible ones (such as grave mounds and dungeon walls)’ and that ‘of spirits shackled by creeds outworn there is no sign at all.’<sup>23</sup> I would argue, however, that the vain religious creeds pilloried in ‘No coward soul is mine’ (1846), Branderham’s sermon and Catherine’s ‘sacrilegious’ speeches (on which Thormählen herself comments) make clear that Brontë is very much concerned with the shackles religion imposes upon one’s spirit.<sup>24</sup> Thormählen reads Brontë’s poetry as a ‘sample-card of views’ on ‘what happens after death,’ rather than, as I suggest, an approach to the living-death experienced within the religious prison.<sup>25</sup> Such a state afflicts the mind more than the body, and thus it is through a concept linked with the imagination that Brontë’s narrators attempt to escape their environment. This concept is the sublime, a divine experience, as I believe Brontë understood it, that lifted the narrators from their metaphorical religious prisons into heaven’s cell, so denying them liberty once again. Enthusiastic narrators are propelled into sublimity because of their religious madness only to find further entrapment. This happens in a sequence of poems discussed below. Before turning to such verse, however, it is necessary to establish how Brontë conceived of the sublime, read differently by so many poets and otherwise again by women.<sup>26</sup>

Brontë’s conception of the sublime lies nearest to the theories of two critics: John Dennis and Edmund Burke. Dennis declared that the sublime was constituted of enthusiastic passion and religious ecstasy, following Longinus who suggested that it

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use ‘self-fortifying imagery’ to draw attention to their restraint within a society dominated by religious values and portrayed through the metaphor of the prison.

<sup>23</sup> Thormählen, *Brontës and Religion*, p.73.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p.113.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p.106.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the woman writer’s relation to the (masculine) sublime, see Jacqueline Labbe, *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* (London: Macmillan, 1998), in particular chapter two, ‘Masculinity, the Sublime, the Picturesque: the Allure of Theory,’ pp.36-65; see also Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women’s Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Nanora Sweet, ‘Heman’s “The Widow of Crescentius”: Beauty, Sublimity and the Woman Hero,’ *Approaches to Teaching British Women Poets of the Romantic Period*, ed. Stephen C. Behrendt and Harriet Kramer Linkin (New York: M.L.A., 1997), pp.101-105; and John Woolford,

raised 'the passions to a violent and even enthusiastic degree.'<sup>27</sup> Marked by dignity, grandeur and moral sensibility, the sublime was easily manipulated by religious movements like Methodism, a rush of emotion which, injected into religious verse, increased the potency of its message. In 'The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry' (1704), Dennis established the sublime as an 'enthusiastic terror' produced by 'religious ideas.'<sup>28</sup> Thus the Bible, lined with inspired truths, was the greatest source of the sublime, poetically written (poetry being the most suitable medium through which to present God with one's thoughts), and animating powerful philosophies Robert Boyle deemed 'sublime mysteries' in a 1663 treatise.<sup>29</sup> Such mysteries, puzzling and overwhelming, animate the believer with both awe and terror, Dennis suggested, ravishing her like the sublime itself. As A. G. A. finds in 'O transient voyager of heaven,' God's mystery overwhelms her as a 'silvery form,' awakening in her a 'thrilling tone' evocative of the sublime (ll.18, 26). Enthusiasm and sublimity thus merged for Brontë as they did for Dennis, the latter deeming them both 'threatening and powerful,' enthusiasm fuelling the sublime with notions of an impassioned and invincible Christian God.<sup>30</sup> Even reason, Dennis contends, that which normally 'serves to dissipate our terrors,' merely augments them 'when we are threatened by infinite power,' our 'fortitude' nothing more than 'downright madness.'<sup>31</sup>

The enthusiasm of which Dennis writes accords with Wesley's enthusiasm, that which sets the spirits 'in a violent emotion' and fires the imagination and brain.<sup>32</sup> When 'so inflamed,' Dennis declared, the imagination renders 'the soul utterly incapable of

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'Elizabeth Barrett and the Wordsworthian Sublime,' *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism*, 45:1 (1995), pp.36-56.

<sup>27</sup> T. R. Martland, 'The Sublime,' *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, 16 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1987), XIV, p.97; Longinus, 'Dionysius Longinus on the sublime,' trans. William Smith (1743), in Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, *The Sublime: A Reader in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.22-29 (p.23).

<sup>28</sup> John Dennis, 'The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry' (1704), in Ashfield and de Bolla, *Sublime*, pp.35-39 (p.37).

<sup>29</sup> Robert Boyle, 'Some considerations touching the style of the Holy Scriptures' (1663) in *The Word "Sublime" and its Context 1650-1760*, ed. Theodore E.B. Wood (Paris: The Hague, Mouton, 1972), p.159.

<sup>30</sup> Dennis, 'Criticism,' p.38.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*, p.38.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, p.39.

reflecting' causing men to rage in fever and fall into madness.<sup>33</sup> The narrator of Brontë's 'To Imagination' (1844) accordingly strives to avoid imaginative power, refusing to 'trust' its 'phantom bliss' for fear of losing herself amidst the fever of its 'hovering vision' (ll.31, 26). Dennis, however, is more emphatic than Brontë or Wesley in his proposition that such feverish feeling might be filtered through the sublime into true religious awe. As Charles Wesley later suggested in his hymn to heaven, God's presence in the world materializes when the believer becomes fearful of it: 'Thy glories blaze all nature round, | And strike the wond'ring sight, | Through skies, and seas, and solid ground | With terror and delight,' a direct invocation of the sublime as a religious tool.<sup>34</sup> It is my argument that such an equation materializes within Brontë's prison-poems, the narrators' enthusiasm propelling them into a sublime which can only summon religious veneration. Those who resist the sublime remain caught within an earthly prison while the narrators swept up in its power become lost within a heavenly realm, forever mad. The same kind of idea is evoked by Burke in *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), read by Brontë in an 1827 edition.<sup>35</sup> Here, Burke divides those who experience the sublime into 'strong' subjects, who resist its frenzy, and 'weak' subjects, who fall into an enthusiastic madness as a result of the encounter, a binary which has clear implications for Brontë as I argue below.

Burke's *Inquiry* does not highlight religion like Dennis' 'The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,' but references to the 'Creator' and 'Deity' remain throughout.<sup>36</sup> The *Inquiry's* aim was primarily aesthetic: to put forth a set of theoretical ideas concerning the sublime and the beautiful, demonstrating the distinctions between them

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, p.39.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Wesley, 'Hymn 217: Eternal Wisdom, thee we praise' [1738], in *The Works of John Wesley: A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists*, ed. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, 26 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), VII, pp.351-352 (ll.25-28).

<sup>35</sup> Published by J. F. Dove, London and housed in the Brontë Parsonage Museum Library.

<sup>36</sup> On Burke's relationship to Methodism, see Edmund Burke, letter to the Duke of Portland, 3 September 1780, wherein Burke wrote of the Methodists that he was 'not quite sure what part they will take, except that negative certainty, that they will not take it for me' in, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. John A. Woods, 10 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), IV, p.271.



to assert their antithesis. Beginning with a discussion of novelty and curiosity as that which urges the reader to feel in the first place, Burke pointed out the fundamental difference between pain and pleasure as central to his theory of the sublime. Pleasure is positive, existing through an active stimulation of the senses, while delight expresses ‘the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger.’<sup>37</sup> Such pain and danger are, Burke declares, ‘simply painful when their causes immediately affect us’ but are ‘delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances [ . . . ] Whatever excites this delight, I call the *sublime*’ (*Inquiry*, p.46). Where the sublime forces the subject to submit before its power, beauty seduces the subject through a kind of indolent and passive flattery. The former is more vivid for Burke, combining delight and horror in a simultaneous feeling that seems endless and infinite, tricking the mind into perceiving the boundlessness of an object or encounter.<sup>38</sup> The consequent feeling is a delirious one, objects ‘whirling about’ so that ‘when we sit down, the objects about us still seem to whirl’ (p.65). Only the courageous can benefit from this loss of control, the strong feeling a temporary awe which tones up their minds and bodies, but the weak unable to withstand the sublime’s intensity. Thus the narrator of ‘Tell me whacher, is it winter?’ (1838), Arthur Gleneden, moves from a strong persona, wherein his rationality prevents him from attacking that which imprisons him, to a weak identity that empowers his imagination to initiate a revenge.

For Burke, however, the fusion of delight and horror becomes too hard a juggling act for the weak subject, prey to the conditions of ‘[m]elancholy, dejection, despair, and often self-murder,’ and indeed, Gleneden is ultimately bound by his own frenzied thoughts of retribution (*Inquiry*, p.113). Fatal for the weak, the sublime overpowers them to such an extent that they come to resemble ‘an appearance very frequent in mad-

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<sup>37</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. Charles W. Eliot (New York: P.P Collier, 1909), p. 34; references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and where necessary, signified by the title *Inquiry*.

<sup>38</sup> Labbe argues that Burke, like other male theorists of the sublime, Kant and Thomas Weiskel, for example, privileges the sublime over the beautiful to assert an aesthetic which is gendered masculine and centred upon an assumption of power. I consider Brontë’s use of the sublime here as that which propels

men,' who remain 'whole days and nights, sometimes whole years, in the constant repetition of some remark, some complaint or song' (p.65). This text, 'which having struck powerfully on their disordered imagination in the beginning of their phrensy' becomes reinforced with 'every repetition' and 'the hurry of their spirits, unrestrained by the curb of reason, continues it to the end of their lives (p.65). The weak are thus rendered incessant delinquents, exposed to the frenzy of Brontë and Wesley's religious enthusiast and unable to resort to reason.<sup>39</sup> Prey to the oppressive effects of the sublime, the frail are subdued by its power and those subsequent feelings of madness and melancholia that produce 'astonishing revolutions in weak minds.'<sup>40</sup> The strong, by comparison, restrict their experience of the sublime, attending always to reason, restraining the 'hurry of their spirits' and so returning from the sublime's intensity intact. While the weak spin into delirium, the strong cling to a subjectivity restrained and imprisoned by reason. The weak, however, have a greater chance of reaching spiritual elation through the sublime, because, like the enthusiast, their madness propels them towards heaven.

Brontë's narrators shift from performing Burke's strong subject, imprisoned and restrained, to adopting the persona of the weak subject, liberated from the realms of a religious society but driven mad in the process. The prison seems an appropriate space in which to experience the sublime, a dusky and terrifying chamber that obscures the world outside and clouds the prisoner's reason with nightmarish thoughts induced by darkness and solitude. The lone prisoner, conveyed by Brontë through the deranged captive in 'The Prisoner: A Fragment,' becomes the prey of obsessive thoughts as Burke

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her narrators out of the prison; her understanding of the beautiful warrants a further discussion beyond the limits of this chapter, see *Romantic Visualities*, pp.40ff.

<sup>39</sup> See John Wesley, 'Sermon 37: The Nature of Enthusiasm' [1750], in *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons II: 34-70*, ed. Albert C. Outler, 26 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), II, pp.44-60 (p.50); Burton, *Anatomy*, p.873.

<sup>40</sup> *Encyclopédie*, in Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* [1961] (London: Tavistock, 1965), p.215: 'The intemperate impressions made by certain extravagant preachers, the excessive fears they inspire of the pains with which our religion threatens those who break its laws, produce astonishing revolutions in weak minds'; see also Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender, and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.250.

argues, the mind so 'filled with its object that it cannot entertain any other' (*Inquiry*, p.51). Only astonishment breaks this suspension of feeling, 'the effect of the sublime in its highest degree' (p.51). Astonishment embraces many passions, notably that of fear, depriving 'the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning,' and terror, 'the ruling principle of the sublime' (p.52). Fear and terror are exacerbated further by darkness, obscurity and a sense of the unknown, the imagination impelled to spiral into a horrifying apprehension of what the senses cannot perceive. While such anxiety 'adds to our dread,' without it, the sublime and its God could not be experienced at all; as Burke argued, 'great clearness helps but little towards affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms' (p.54).<sup>41</sup>

Like Wesley, Burke tries to catalogue and define sublimity and enthusiasm, undertaking to control a possibly dangerous experience by setting its limit at the Christian God. As Burke stated his 'attempt to range and methodize' the 'leading passions' of the sublime, Wesley declared that all discussion of God must avoid 'elaborate, elegant, or oratorical dress.'<sup>42</sup> Both thinkers, then, are threatened by the potential of language, in poem, discourse or sermon, to induce free thought that might spiral outside of the Christian world. Wesley, for example, instructs believers to follow his standard in abstaining from all 'philosophical speculations; from all perplexed and

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<sup>41</sup> Burke, like Dennis, moves from the sublime to an appraisal of the significance of poetry, the most obscure of arts and so able to hold the most 'general' and 'powerful dominion over the passions' (*Inquiry*, p.54). For Burke, words have the greatest ability to excite 'ideas of beauty and of the sublime,' more capable 'of making deep and lively impressions than any other arts, and even than nature itself in very many cases' (pp.136, 145). References to Homer, Milton, Virgil and Spenser focus upon the representation of uncertainty, obscurity and anticipation through poetry. Homer's Menelaus is highlighted for his feelings of melancholic pleasure as opposed to their cause; Milton's descriptions of Death and Satan are both rendered through their blackness and obscurity; the focus on Virgil's astonishment at 'the boldness of his own designs' for attempting to 'unlock the secrets of the great deep' are raised above his actual discoveries; and Spenser is quoted for his rendering of light as 'uncertain' and fading (pp.35, 53, 55, 63, 74). Even 'the common sort of people,' barred from comprehension of high art and poetics, become roused by the poetical resonances of ballads, popular poems and the sermons of the 'fanatic preacher' (p.54). The enthusiastic pastor, preaching in poetical metre and so manipulating the most obscure of genres, evokes both fear and terror for Burke, recalling Dennis' emphasis on 'terrible religion.' Narrated by poet and preacher alike, versical evocation of the sublime becomes, in Burke's words, a 'hymn to the Creator' whose 'wisdom' and invincibility enables such feeling (*Inquiry*, p.47).

<sup>42</sup> John Wesley, 'Preface,' *Forty Four Sermons: Sermons on Several Occasions* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), pp.v-vii (p.v).



intricate reasonings; and, as far as possible, from even the show of learning.’<sup>43</sup> While Wesley’s prose is undoubtedly marked by immense knowledge other than theology, his agenda remained to ‘design plain truth for plain people’ forgetting ‘all that ever I have read in my life’ but scripture.<sup>44</sup> Wesley and Burke appear terrified of the revolutionary implications of the mind liberated from establishment notions, whether of religion, politics or gender. The subject, then, must encounter sublimity as a path to God, believing that she is protected from danger, or, as Burke suggests, adopt a strong, implicitly masculine persona able to withstand the sublime’s force.

Brontë’s sublime parallels Burke’s, based on fear, terror, obscurity and so on, but goes beyond it, attempting to break out of the limits imposed by a Christian God by evoking the powerful emotions associated with enthusiasm. Dennis’ notion of the individual overpowered by the sublime and so released into an elevated religious realm removed from feelings of dread also occurs within Brontë’s poetry, although she deems such a result problematic. Removing the sublime from the mountain to the cell, Brontë identifies her enthusiastic narrators as Burkean ‘weak’ subjects. Confined in a prison representative of religious oppression, the poet’s narrators become delirious and thus mistakenly seek the comfort of God, a move which propels them into a greater delirium defined as an enthusiastic, religious, and thus imprisoning, sublime. The narrator may resist the sublime by adopting a ‘strong’ persona, but such a decision perpetuates her incarceration within reason and religious convention. Weak subjects, while ultimately defeated by the sublime, still aspire towards a boundlessness and liberty Burke and Wesley denounce as subversive, the former fearing revolution, the latter enthusiastic Christianity. In always looking toward the realization of liberty on earth and in heaven, Brontë’s weak subjects are progressive and radical, but precluded from real freedom by the prison and God. I argue in Part II that religion’s role as a prison on earth is repeated throughout Brontë’s poetry, forever emphatic of dark, obscure and inert portrayals of worldly existence that simply recur within heaven.

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, p.v.

## II Religion as Prison

What follows are readings of a number of poems in approximate chronological sequence to suggest that Brontë's concept of the prison as a metaphor of religion continues through, and beyond, *Wuthering Heights* in 1847. As the sublime consistently fails to grant emancipation from religion to Brontë's narrators, the poet intimates the limits of a concept ostensibly liberating but, to her mind at least, too rooted in theological origin to release the thinker from religion's fetters. The following readings fall into three sections. First, I establish Brontë's use of the enthusiastic sublime in four poems from 1837, revealing how the narrator's enthusiasm marks her confrontation with a terrifying Christian God. Second, I turn to Brontë's 'prison-poems' narrated by speakers located within dungeon walls who experience the enthusiastic sublime, closing this part with a reading of 'The Prisoner: A Fragment.' I discuss those poems which promise and then defer freedom from religious enthusiasm for their narrators in a third section, converging upon the image of the ocean as ostensibly liberatory. To conclude, however, I return to the theme of imprisonment as it appears in one of Brontë's last poems, 'Why ask to know the date – the clime?' (1846) to infer the poet's resolution that religion remained inescapable in her time.

### (i) The Enthusiastic Sublime

This first section examines Brontë's employment of enthusiastic sublime experience in four poems from 1837, 'There shines the moon, at noon of night,' 'O transient voyager of heaven,' 'O God of heaven! the dream of horror' and 'The night of storms has passed.' While these poems are not spoken by narrators within a physical prison, they remain sealed within a religious and enthusiastic rhetoric. 'There shines the moon, at

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, p.v.

noon of night,' for example, spoken by A. G. A., portrays the narrator trapped within a location where her lover, the military Alexander, Lord of Elbë, had previously died under her gaze.<sup>45</sup> She is fixed to the spot by a delirium invoked by the semi-religious ambience created within the poem. The moon under which she stands, for instance, evokes a 'Vision of Glory,' 'Holy as heaven – undimmed and pure,' granting her narration a religious frame (ll.2-4). An illuminating force amidst the darkness of the 'drear moor,' the moon appears sublime here, invoked as a spiritual and enthusiastic force which only hints at the vast heavenly realm that lies 'Beyond its zone of silver sky' (ll.6, 8). The narrator confesses that such a sphere 'seems strange' to her, positioning heaven as an alien and unfamiliar land (l.7). Even the natural earth, however, seems to portray religion here. The 'firn-leaves' sigh 'Like mourners over Elbë's grave' waving upon the moor as if part of a church ceremony, and the sun casts a 'fount of gold devine' upon the scene (ll.13-14, 23). Now within 'Stern winter,' however, Elbë's rotted blood has frozen upon the 'heathery plain' where he died, terrifying A. G. A. and increasing a sense of sublimity that promises to release the subject from religious oppression (ll.28, 24).

The chilly and ghostly atmosphere of the poem imbues it with a feeling of impending death and so danger, Elbë's memory haunting A. G. A. who was the indirect cause of his demise. Remaining always within the spectral radiance of the moon, A. G. A. shifts her narration to a recollection of 'Old Elbë Hall,' the soldier's residence when away from home, a serene reminiscence full of a 'golden sunshine,' 'amber light' and 'cloudless air' (ll.48, 49, 52). Here, 'summer Heavens' enlighten A. G. A.'s memory, but to Elbë, the narrator tells the reader, the place always seemed one of bitterness and imprisonment, away from his 'native country' (ll.46, 58). Marked by a heavenly and 'devine' climate, Elbë became crazed here, 'maddening with despair and pain' before he died and crying to A. G. A. that she would soon 'forget' his 'lonely grave' (ll.55-57, 67). Driven mad by the 'devine' atmosphere that invokes God and heaven, Elbë is

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<sup>45</sup> Fannie E. Ratchford, *Gondal's Queen: A Novel in Verse by Emily Jane Brontë* (Austin: University of



enthusiastic by the end of the poem, embraced further by a frenzy spurred by his thwarted love for A. G. A. Her narration implies that she deranged Elbë as much as God did, assuming the latter's role and, as the most dictatorial and oppressive Gondal character, his omnipotence. She experiences the sublime here, not only through the moonlight and darkness, but in her final assumption of power, controlling Elbë's words from line fifty-seven. Frenzied by the memory of a lover she manipulated and repressed, A. G. A. appears touched by madness too, an angry god who lacks sympathy for the man whose grave lies before her, and illuminated in her power by the moon's ominous light.

Thrown into prison after her narration in 'There shines the moon, at noon of night,' A. G. A. becomes delirious and thus encounters the enthusiastic sublimity of God in her poetical entreaty 'O transient voyager of heaven.' As a 'transient voyager,' God follows A. G. A. wherever she goes, an 'adverse wind' as Christ is characterized in 'The Prisoner: A Fragment,' who pushes her into the 'dungeons' where she is now held (ll.1, 3-4). Appearing to mourn Elbë's death further here, indicated in lines six and fifteen, A. G. A. is maddened by her sadness as well as her detachment from the world and enclosure within God's grasp. As God blows through her prison bars as a wintry visitor, the narrator becomes amazed that the jailers have not 'checked a thing so frail,' his enthusiastic power overwhelming (l.8). His 'angel-like' 'silvery form' shines through the darkness of her cell like the luminous moonlight of the previous poem, a 'voiceless, souless, messenger' awakening a 'thrilling tone' within her (ll.17-19, 25-26). Such a thrill recalls the enthusiasm of the believer encountering God, comforting A. G. A. as well as enabling her to throw off the constraints imposed upon her body within the cell by summoning the spatially infinite sublime to her mind. God's presence within the prison provokes the imagination to conjure feelings of liberty, and yet negates real freedom, producing the delightful and enthusiastic horror on which Burke comments (*Inquiry*, p.64).

The sublime horror of God is evoked more powerfully still in 'O God of heaven! the dream of horror.' Also narrated by A. G. A., the poem recounts her experience within prison before she is released to sail for Gaaldine, but even when free, A. G. A. remains touched by delirium and bitterness. The opening four stanzas offer a striking portrait of her persona within prison, one which distinctly accords with those descriptions of the religious enthusiast from Wesley and others as discussed in chapter two. The Christian 'God of heaven' is immediately heralded within line one as a force productive of horrific, sublime dreams, causing the believer to spiral into a frenzy (l.1). His reign of terror, A. G. A. recalls, imposed upon her 'frightful' dreams, 'sickening' her heart and 'blasting' her with sorrow (ll.2-3). The 'ghastly night the ghastlier morrow' provoked her to ache with a 'sense of utter woe' so that she cries 'burning tears,' responded to by her jailers only with mocking 'groans' (ll.3-6). 'Tossing' and 'anguished,' the narrator recites how her 'grinding teeth and staring eye' intensified the 'agony' she felt, a description deeming her deranged and melancholic (ll.11-13). Driven on only by despair, A. G. A. depicts her 'impatient rage' and struggles to conceive 'thoughts that yet could not be borne,' her intellectual abilities halted by the emotional pull of her delirious soul (ll.16-18). A. G. A. becomes an enthusiast here, searching always for a God she knows will enthrall and infuriate her into a frenzy.

Such enthusiasm prevents A. G. A. from finding real liberty within the poem, even as she writes 'I am free' in the fifth verse, sailing over to Gaaldine away from her prison (l.21). For the shocking and despondent feelings she records in the first four stanzas are countered by a freedom related to the expanse of the 'ocean' and its caressing 'wild wind,' a stormy and fierce picture that reflects her crazed disposition (ll.22-23). Enlivened by the 'Bright Sea' on which she sails, A. G. A.'s speech is nevertheless fragmented, betrayed by the Dickinson-like dashes within verse five and six (l.25). She admits that she 'can not speak | My voice is choked, but not with grief,' suggesting that another form of mental blockage, that of enthusiastic madness, I argue, prevents her expression (ll.27-29). Swinging between repose, enthusiasm and

resentment, A. G. A.'s dialogue appears more and more frenzied, and she recalls image upon image that flash through her mind simultaneously haunting and calming her. Her tears fall as she remembers them wetting a 'dongoen floor - | Falling on flag-stones damp and grey,' and revealing at last that in prison her 'woe' was 'calmer' than her present moment (ll.31-32, 37). Like Byron's Prisoner of Chillon who feels the 'winter's spray | Wash through the bars when winds were high,' the narrator seems sedated by the 'winter's snow' that tranquilly drifts through her prison bars (ll.119-120; ll.35-36). Inside the cell, her soul sought the God which enthused her like a drug, searching for 'the arch of heaven devine' with its 'clouds of gold,' an image at once seductive and repellent to the narrator (ll.47-48). The madness she suffered as a result of her belief still haunts her, 'O even now too horribly | Come back the feelings,' and again, her enthusiastic actions dominate the narration: 'I flung myself upon the stone | I howled and tore my tangled hair | And then when the first gush had flown | Lay in unspeakable despair' (ll.42, 49, 55-58).

The violence that scars A. G. A.'s presentation of her enthusiasm evokes the sublime, her psychological terror of God reducing her to silence and paralysis. The pull towards God, however, seems constant and she confesses: 'Sometimes a curse some times a prayer | Would quiver on my parched tongue' even as both withered 'in the breast from whence they sprung' (ll.59-62). Caught within an enthusiastic 'strange and spectral dream | Whose phantom horrors made me know | The worst extent of human woe,' A. G. A. seems frozen in a sublime apprehension of humanity's plight, always lured by God. Eager to bring her brooding narration to an end, A. G. A. too quickly halts her prison recollections, condemning such enthusiasm to a troubled past. Yet Brontë's point is to convey how one cannot escape God, and while her narrator reminds herself and others to 'Shake off the fetters Break the chain,' it seems an impossible feat (l.71). For while she stresses that she is now free to 'live and love and smile,' such optimism is offset by the final stanza, wherein the 'dongoen's thrawl,' 'gnawing greif' and 'hopeless tears' are resurrected and stand predominant (ll.72, 74-75). The closing



phrase, 'Forget them - O forget them all - ' is shattered and bemused when compared to her assertive memories of despair and delusion, and her enthusiastic entrapment within God's grasp remains (l.76). A. G. A. finds God because her enthusiasm drives her to him, and sublimely caught in his invincibility, her madness prevails as is clear within other enthusiastic narratives she recites.

God's despotism is also highlighted to gruesome effect in the poem, 'The night of storms has passed,' a nightmare narrated by a Gondolian soldier foretelling the horrors of the war in which he fights. Now woken from his reverie, the narrator chases frenzied 'visions from my head' that troubled him in the night-time 'hours of gloom,' his soul 'wrapt away' in a terrifying and sublime apparition. The rest of his central narrative, occurring between lines eleven and forty, recounts this horrible dream. Standing by a 'marble tomb' in which 'royal corpses' lie, the narrator positions himself within a graveyard, and is soon confronted by the ghosts and spirits that dwell there (ll.11-12). Being 'just the time of eve | When parted ghosts might come,' the midnight darkness embraces ghouls who rise 'Above their prisoned dust,' conveying that, even after death, the soul remains trapped, only temporarily rising at night (ll.13-15). Briefly distracted by this spectral illusion, the narrator suddenly turns to encounter a 'shadowy thing | Most dim,' whose 'presence' curdles the narrator's 'blood with ghastly fear' (ll.18-20). The monster, terrifying and yet of no threat inside the narrator's dream, seems truly sublime, and fixes its onlooker's 'eyes with maddening gaze' (l.24). Falling down before the nameless being, the narrator cannot 'turn away,' his words dying in a 'voiceless moan' like A. G. A.'s in 'O God of heaven! the dream of horror' (ll.27-29). Like A. G. A. too, the narrator becomes enthusiastic, beginning 'to pray' only when imprisoned by the sublime presence of an invincible power whose rule over the dead unveils the monster to be God. Both 'close by and yet more far' than 'the farthest star,' the being mimics God's role as one everywhere on earth but always in heaven (ll.33-34). Sublime and horrific on one level, the monstrous being seems also to warn the narrator of the terrors of war, causing him to face the hellish realm of the

afterlife: a 'gulph o'er which mortality | Has never never been' (ll.39-40). The gulf resembles an ocean: an abyss crammed with the dead. This 'sea of deaths eternity' imprisons the deceased forever, only momentarily freed to ascend from their dusty tombstones at night, like the ghosts the narrator first glimpses (l.38). When the shadowy thing speaks, the narrator's nightmare ends, and yet he seems convinced that 'heavens lights' shiver before him as if to acknowledge the power of their ruler. The 'woe' he now envisions all wars engender marks the last three verses, 'ringing' like a sad lament which almost breaks the narrator's heart (ll.47, 51, 55, 57).

Destructive and abhorrent in its own right, then, war is doubly despised here as a forbidding porthole to heaven's prison gates, conflict linked again with religion as in 'A sudden chasm of ghastly light,' as I argued in chapter two. Like the previous three poems, 'The night of storms has passed' uses the sublime experience as a kind of bridge between an enthusiastic narrator-madman and his detested God. Once enthusiastic, these narrators seem terrified by their attraction to God, fearing the fate which awaits them after death, namely, ascension into heaven. Thus Brontë's conception of the afterlife comes to mirror a specifically Methodist idea of hell (commented on by the poet in 'The Prisoner: A Fragment'), an 'infernal region,' Wesley stated, an 'unvaried scene of horror upon horror,' where 'eternity' reigns like 'the sands of the sea.'<sup>46</sup> Brontë's anxiety about death materializes, not as an end to mortal life, however, but as a ticket to a devilish and stern heaven. She seems to suggest that, once caught in paradise, the subject is irredeemably imprisoned within God's grasp, more so than upon earth, and her poetical narrators strive to identify an alternative place of rest. Two poems, both written in 1841, exemplify this struggle, 'I see around me tombstones grey' and 'Were they shepherds, who sat all day?' mapping the death of A.G.A: the first positioning immortality on earth as a preferable option to heaven; and the second exemplifying the poet's refusal of death through her favoured narrator, A. G. A., whose battle with her

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<sup>46</sup> John Wesley, 'Sermon 73: Of Hell' [1788], in *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons III: 71-114*, ed. Albert C. Outler, 26 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), III, pp.30-43 (pp.41); further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text, and where necessary, signified by the title 'Of Hell.'

murderers almost allegorically conveys Brontë's affray with religion. While not specifically set in prison, the poems remain claustrophobic and repressive in tone, despair, death and a sense that the unbelieving individual belongs nowhere predominant themes.

Brontë more clearly elucidates religion's imprisoning power in those poems set within the prison, however, and it is to three examples of such poetry that I now turn: 'Tell me, whacher, is it winter?' (1838), 'Thy sun is near meridian height' (1840) and 'The Prisoner: A Fragment' (1845). These poems most obviously portray those narrators who adopt first, the persona of Burke's strong subject and second, that of Burke's weak subject. As I noted above, Burke's strong subject is able to withstand the sublime's power by attending always to reason, restrained from the sublime's profound influence by her rational sense that she is not really in danger. The weak subject, however, is prey to the fusion of delight and horror the sublime grants, subdued by its power and consequently, driven into a state of delirium and madness. Spiritually elated by the sublime, the weak consciousness is propelled towards heaven, open to what Burke calls 'all enthusiasms' (*Inquiry*, p.54). Brontë's imprisoned narrator, then, strong because restrained but then weak because enthusiastic, is liberated within her mind from the realms of the prison, and thus religious ideology, but only into a sublimity representative of heaven. Lost within the paradisial space into which the sublime elevates her, the narrator remains forever trapped within a devastating enthusiastic frenzy, imposed upon her by belief in a Christian God.

## (ii) The Prison Poems

'Tell me, whacher, is it winter?' enacts a dialogue between an imprisoned narrator, probably Arthur Gleneden, and a second narrator who communicates to him the state of the outside world. According to Ratchford, the Gleneden family rule over Exina, a province of Gondal, until Julius Brenzaida invades and colonizes, resisted by Angelica



and her band of outlaws who finally assassinate the dictator.<sup>47</sup> Imprisoned here as Brenzaida's enemy, Gleneden suffers within the poem from a sublime nightmare wherein he murders a tellingly 'devine' Brenzaida, and becomes delirious within his 'fever-dream' (ll.60, 71). Like his noble peer and lover, A. G. A., Brenzaida claims a tyrannical power which grants him an association with God. The poem begins by rendering the prisoner's desperate disposition, bared by his frenzied interrogation of an anonymous external observer who is questioned six times in eight lines. The 'whacher' describes the outside world in stanzas three and four as regenerated, leaves dying but renewed each spring, and once frozen water now melted by 'South soft winds,' bringing rain to the valleys and flowers (ll.9-16). The 'lonely prison' space is, by contrast, one of inertia and constant winter, 'Shut from joy and kindly air' (ll.17-18). In a vision sent from God, the narrator is commanded to endure his plight, a sublime experience evoked by 'Heaven, descending in a vision' and teaching his 'soul to do and bear – ' (ll.19-20). Impelled into an enthusiastic-like frenzy inspired directly by heaven, then, the narrator enters into a sublime reverie, struck down upon 'the dungeon floor' and plagued by thoughts of his past which 'pondered untill maddness | Struck its poignard in my brain' (ll.22, 31-32).

The prisoner's dementia pushes his imagination more violently into this dream as he states 'deepest slumber followed raving,' and a terrible vision of Exina's downfall appears before him, its liberty 'Tortured,' hopes destroyed and 'noblest sons' fallen 'in vain' (ll.33, 44, 47-48). As the country is ruined, 'Hut and castle, hall and cottage | Roofless, crumbling to the ground,' heaven's presence is again felt, here as an 'Avenger,' a singular force of revenge, raised as a tyrant like Brenzaida (ll.49-50, 51). Indeed, the poem's apparent objective, to denounce Brenzaida's evil campaign, seems deferred in order to institute an attack upon heaven which is constructed as a vengeful power enforcing its own form of 'eternal Justice' in the world, one which has imprisoned the narrator (l.52). Such inequity increases the prisoner's sense of despair

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<sup>47</sup> See Ratchford, *Gondal's Queen*, pp.101-111.

and thus his insanity, a state of mind betrayed by his confession that he, 'that once would shudder | Even to pierce a wounded deer,' is now crazed and violent (ll.53-54). No longer restrained by reason, the prisoner passes from Burke's strong subject to his weak, maddened by the horrific and sublime visions of revenge and bloodshed within his mind. Intent to 'Choke in blood' his 'sovereign's prayer,' the prisoner attacks both Brenzaida on one level, and God on another, the two merging into 'a man of form devine' in line sixty (ll.56, 60). The figure, embraced by 'adoring thousands,' gleams like a young Christ, a favourite of the people at first (l.59). Like Christ too, the figure is a 'princely victim,' accepted only to be spurned and murdered by the prisoner whose ear, he recalls, 'drank his dying sigh!' (ll.61, 68).

Death darkens the Prince's 'lightening' glare of power and the prisoner's dagger lies drenched with blood to imply his guilt (l.63). The murderer's dream appears to end here, his mind dimmed by 'Shadows' of delirium cast by God himself, causing the prisoner to repent:

O my God, I know it all!

- Know the fever-dream is over;

Unavenged, the Avengers fall!' (ll.69-72).

As the mighty avenger, heaven falls, unable to control the prisoner who is lost to madness and enthusiasm, the exclamatory end to his narration marking an extreme frenzy. While he states that the dream is over, however, the reader may decide otherwise. Stranded within the shadows and darkness of midnight, Gleneden seems still within the dream which itself began in 'night, a night of winter' (l.21). So too might the reader rethink the identity of the fallen Avengers in line seventy-two. 'Unavenged,' that is, unable to defeat the enthusiastic sublime in which he is caught, the prisoner and his countrymen seem to be the avengers that fall, retaliating against both Brenzaida and the religious oppression his God-like status represents. While the prisoner used his sublime

feeling to envisage a dream wherein he might defeat religion, he becomes entangled there, incapable of returning to reality, as Burke predicted of the weak subject. As the reader learns in 'From our evening fireside now' (1839), the sequel to 'Tell me, whacher, is it winter?' 'Arthur,' the prisoner, is 'absent,' lost to a 'darkly dawned [ . . . ] day' that records his frenetic demise (ll.17, 27).<sup>48</sup> Enthusiasm finally captures him, then, a religious fervour invoked by Brenzaida's godly power.

Gleneden's fate is to suffer from enthusiasm because he is distraught by a dream, religious in overtone, in which he murders the autocrat who has seized power over his people. In 'Thy sun is near meridian height,' Fernando de Samara, a betrayed lover of A. G. A., is also driven into enthusiasm within prison, here because he has erected this cruel queen as his God. He imagines that A. G. A. stands before the outside sun as it reaches a 'meridian height,' his sun sunk in an 'endless night,' setting an obscure scene in which the sublime can be accommodated (ll.1-2).<sup>49</sup> The prisoner seems aware of his entrapment within an 'early tomb,' bitter that his life of 'long agonizing years' with A. G. A. is 'punished by eternal tears' within the cell (ll.5, 7-8). He is not blameless in the situation, having cheated on his own sweetheart when engaging with A. G. A., a romance idealized between stanzas fifteen and eighteen. Now imprisoned, the narrator is hostile to his false lover, and feels remorse towards the woman he failed, expressing 'pangs that wring from my mortal breast' (l.13). He wonders deliriously within prison, questioning the Christian 'God of *hate*' who watches his 'own creations dread despair!' and struggling for an answer, as if rejected from a heavenly realm he believes could bring absolution (ll.10-12). Even when embraced by 'Earth's wilderness,' he remains

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<sup>48</sup> Roper and Chitham link the two poems, stating that Brontë marked the manuscript of 'Tell me, whacher, is it winter?' with a bold '1' in ink above the title, and writing '2' above 'From our evening fireside now' which is copied immediately before it, in *Poems*, p.231.

<sup>49</sup> Chitham observes an allusion to *Prometheus Unbound* here, a poem which speaks of the 'light from the meridian sun' casting its rays of gloom as darkness fills 'the seat of power,' lines encountered by Brontë, perhaps, in *Frasers* magazine which published an article on Shelley in June 1838. Brontë began working as a teacher at Law Hill in September of 1838, supervised by the headmistress, Elizabeth Patchett, who seems to have passed on the article to her and with whom she seems have developed a strong relationship. Chitham cautiously submits that much of the passion within Brontë's poems of this time may be related to 'some deep personal attachment' she forged during her Law Hill 'exile' with the 'handsome horse-riding



exposed to 'Heaven's tempests' which beat his 'naked head' as if forcing him down into prayer (ll.21-22). He does not kneel, however, claiming 'in vain would prayer | Have sought one gleam of mercy there!' his enthusiasm reserved until madness sets in within stanza eleven (ll.23-24).

Repudiating God's mercy, the prisoner witnesses the 'grim concave' of heaven circling over him and frowning at his sin, 'Hoarding its lightnings to destroy' A. G. A., still his 'priceless joy' (ll.26-28).<sup>50</sup> 'They struck' he quickly remarks, to intimate that heaven's bolt-like power broke him from A. G. A. even though it could 'never blot the past from me' (ll.29, 32). For heaven offers the prisoner only 'undreamt felicity,' happiness that cannot be conceived within the oppressive religious space of paradise (l.31). It is as if heaven teases him, hovering above his cell but offering no comfort, its presence serving to compel his enthusiastic insanity which begins to take effect. The prisoner notes that while his body lives, his mind has been killed, left 'in chains and darkness' as 'reasons light' leaves 'his brow' and 'madness' sets in, converting him from Burke's strong, reasoned individual into a weak subject prey to the sublime (ll.41, 43-44). Awaiting death, the prisoner becomes increasingly delirious, 'raving,' 'Lost, cursed, degraded,' all for A. G. A., that God-like power that excites his enthusiasm (ll.49-50). Like the God of hate the prisoner puzzled over in stanza three, A. G. A. is untouched by his plight, her 'soul free from fear' and memory barred from the idyllic scenes of their past romance he now recalls (l.46). She is trapped within a 'Lethian rest' as he is within the sublime, and he wills his cruel God to 'wring' her 'spirit' in hell with his, 'Virtue and faith and Heaven' vanishing to leave only the repressive elements of religion which enforce his fanaticism. He is pushed into enthusiasm, then, by a cruel sublime power, sent by God to enclose him further within religious ideology.

Fernando's narrative peaks in a further poem, 'Light up thy halls! Tis closing day' (1838), wherein the prisoner's hopelessness and frenzy intensify, and he becomes

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headmistress' or even Patchett's neighbour, the famous lesbian Anne Lister of Shibden, who had returned from a continental trip in November 1838, in *A Life*, pp.112, 120.

dizzy with dreamy visions of his deceiving lover. It is unclear whether Fernando remains imprisoned here or is free, wandering through darkly lit halls and over gloomy moors that reside either within his touched mind or the outside world. A. G. A. still haunts him in his roving with a 'dazzling [sic] shine' that prefigures the hypnotic 'dazzeling land' of heaven in 'I see around me tombstones grey,' linking her again to God (l.7). The prisoner's 'one last, one burning prayer –' sets his heart on fire as it freezes upon his tongue, an enthusiastic plea to God, whom he questions in line sixteen before finally taking his own life (ll.9-11). As his hand 'is streaming wet' with his 'heart's blood,' the prisoner expires caught within the sublime: he does not fear death, but vividly encounters its threat (ll.21-22). The darkness draws in marking the sublime obscurity of the scene, and he enthusiastically recalls his 'vain, frenzied thoughts!' which become 'Lost in the vacant air' with 'frantic curses' (ll.37-38). Like God, A. G. A. cannot control his inner self or resolve, but she remains dictator over his being: 'Unconquered in my soul the Tyrant rules me still,' the prisoner cries, incapable of killing his love for her as the enthusiast is passionately bound to God (l.43). Suicide ends Fernando's madness temporarily, but, if we follow the fate of Lord Alfred S., his ghostly resurrection will ensure a continued enthusiasm, barred from heaven for ending his own life, but forever bound to the queen.

The two prisoners in 'Tell me, whacher, is it winter?' and 'Thy sun is near meridian height' are locked away because overpowered by Gondal's two leading characters, Julius Brenzaida and A. G. A. Both figures are presented through religious language: divine, adored, watched over by heaven and inspiring enthusiastic followers. Prisoners who do not invoke Brenzaida or A. G. A. as the cause of their madness in Brontë's poetry usually speak from within what Ratchford calls the Republican-Royalist War in Gondal, an era following the demise of the two godly masters.<sup>51</sup> The same religious language predominates these prisoners' dialogues, however. The inmate of 'I

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<sup>50</sup> Roper and Chitham compare 'heaven's dark blue vault' in Shelley's 'Queen Mab,' I: l.232, in *Poems*, p.247.

<sup>51</sup> Ratchford, *Gondal's Queen*, p.163ff.

know that tonight, the wind is sighing,' for example, cowers on 'the damp black flags of my dungeon-floor -' yearning for 'One gleam' of the 'heaven-bright' moon to ascend upon him (ll.4, 8). Desperate for the light of heaven, represented by the moon to imply the idea of lunacy, the prisoner wastes away in the darkness of his cell, an obscure and sublime gloom that 'gathers up thoughts akin to madness' (l.11). Brontë's prisoners, then, suffer from a madness animated by a power the reader may consistently interpret as religious. Only Brenzaida seems to escape enthusiasm while in prison, as he declares in 'Listen! when your hair like mine,' narrated from the dungeons of the Southern College. Brenzaida too has been locked up because of a misplaced desire for a 'despot queen,' but it is not A. G. A., and while the figure, Rosina, is described similarly as a beautiful sovereign, no religious language frames her being (l.40). The prisoner is accused by the court of indulging in 'earthly pleasures' with Rosina, but his very actions lead him away from heaven, rather than back to it, inimical to 'Heavenly knowledge' (ll.21-22).<sup>52</sup> Flung into the 'dungeon-damp,' Brenzaida despairs, but sustains no madness and where frenzy and delirium are absent, God does not exist.

The above poems map the process in which Brontë's prisoners become enthused by a religious power which grants them a sublime experience, pushing them further into God's hands. Thus they remain caught within a sublime space and are unable to regain consciousness within reality, trapped within their enthusiastic madness. 'The Prisoner: A Fragment' views this process from a different angle, however, and so provides an interesting comparison. Here, the narrator visits a prisoner already enthusiastic, absorbed by God's power and thoroughly frenzied, leading many critics to discuss the poem as an expression of mysticism as argued in chapter one. I view such 'mystical' experience as a portrayal of enthusiasm in accordance with Brontë's Methodist, rather than mystic, culture and environment. The reading which ensues examines the poem in

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<sup>52</sup> Ratchford suggests that Augusta Geraldine Almeda, Princess of Alcona, a province in Gondal, and later Queen of Gondal is variously known as A. G. A., A. G. Almeda, Geraldine, Rosina, Rosina of Alcona and



terms of five structuring points: first, the initial narrator and visitor to the dungeon seems to represent the reader, both attracted to and repelled by the exhibited enthusiasm; second, the figure of the warder or jailer depicts St Peter, I think, the holder of heaven's keys and imprisoned at least twice within his lifetime; third, I acknowledge the significance of the St Peter-like jailer's cruel master, a Christ figure whose presence prevails over the poem; fourth, I turn to the captive's narrative, enthusiastic and sublime rather than mystical; and fifth, I read Wesley's sermon on hell, referred to above, as a blueprint for the actual 'dungeon-crypts' in which the action takes place. Taken from a longer Gondal poem, 'Silent is the House – all are laid asleep,' a dialogue between characters Julian M. and A.G. Rochelle, 'The Prisoner' seems a more focused presentation of the poet's conception of religion.

The poem begins as the first narrator enters 'idly' into 'the dungeon-crypts,' unaware of those who waste 'there away' and commanding the prison guard to unlock to "“ponderous bars!”" (ll.1-3). As the jailer opens the cell, the 'hinges' on its door 'harshly turn' to convey that few enter such a gloomy dwelling unless imprisoned there (l.4). The dawdling and apathetic viewer parallels the bystander keen to witness the spectacle of Bedlam, as she gazes upon the ostracized, but is subdued by the dismal picture that confronts her:

'Our guests are darkly lodged,' I whisper'd, gazing through  
 The vault, whose grated eye showed heaven more grey than blue;  
 (This was when glad spring laughed in awaking pride;)  
 'Aye, darkly lodged enough!' returned my sullen guide (ll.5-8).

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Alcona, in *Gondal's Queen*, p.43; I believe A. G. A. is represented under many guises, but Rosina does not seem to be one of them, for the reasons I give above.

The opened prison doors reveal a vault through which the narrator sees heaven: God's paradise literally becomes the prison space.<sup>53</sup> Unexpectedly 'more grey than blue,' heaven's gloom provokes the earthly season of spring to laugh proudly, more animated and bracing than the place humanity is so quick to piously aspire toward (l.6). Heaven appears a fortified and cruel place, literally a prison, restricting its inmates within "triple walls" as the narrator notes, bound down and "clench[ed]" with "fetters" (ll.11-12). The narrator carelessly mocks the incarcerated "guests" by scoffing "art thou so much to fear | That we must bind thee down," answered by a young captive who lies within (ll.11-12). The prisoner embodies simplicity, goodness and innocence, a small girlish figure from whom pain and grief seem absent, her face 'soft and mild | As a sculptured marble saint, or slumbering unwean'd child' (ll.13-14). She claims to have "been struck" in the same manner as Fernando de Samara in 'Thy sun is near meridian height,' 'struck' by heaven's lightning bolts and sent into enthusiasm like the captive here (l.18). She addresses both the intrusive narrator and the jailer, conceding the suffering she endures, but finding the restraining "bolts and irons" of "little worth," adding, "And were they forged in steel, they could not hold me long" (ll.17-20).

Having established the ignorant status of the visiting narrator and painful imprisonment of the captive, the poem turns to the jailer, lurching around the prison with his keys and deferring only to his 'master' (l.25). Like the first narrator, the warder derides the prisoners, his 'hoarse' laughter mocking the innocent captive, as he denies her the liberty for which she prays and weeps (l.21). "Dost think, fond, dreaming wretch," he cries, "that *I* shall grant thy prayer?" rejecting her as he knows his master would, an authoritarian also detached and indifferent to the "groans" of the inmates (ll.22-23). A figure obsessed with power, the jailer sniggers at the prisoner, repudiating her piety in an exercise of strength over both her and the gates to heaven which he controls. From the Bible Brontë would have been familiar with St Peter as the warden of heaven, Christ declaring: 'And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this

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<sup>53</sup> It is notable that Pre-Raphaelite art tends to depict heaven in a similar manner, often glanced at from

rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (Matthew 16. 17-19). St Peter, then, provides an appropriate model for Brontë's jailer, stubborn, inquisitive and controlling the 'binding' and 'loosing' of believers within heaven, carrying two keys to the kingdom. Denying Christ three times after he has avowed, 'Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death,' he here fulfils his promise, entering into heaven's prison vaults as Christ's commander and submitting before this barbarian master (Luke 22. 23).

St Peter was associated with imprisonment and cavernous tombs within scripture, having been incarcerated during the outbreak of persecution under Herod Agrippa I. Released from Herod by angels, the saint transcended his restriction even though bound by chains and numerous soldiers. Imprisoned again in the Mamertine prison by Nero, he emerged only to be crucified, but his popularity caused his devotees to move his body in the year 258, out of his tomb beside the Vatican to a hiding place within a series of sepulchral chambers. Lifted by angels from prison and buried within a secret mausoleum, St Peter provided Brontë with a supernatural and secretive figure, corrupted from his status as a fisherman, part of the natural world, into a Christian keeper of heaven's prison. His gothic characterization as the jailer renders him a Frankenstein's monster, an angry pawn controlled by a manipulative creator ignorant of the outcome his actions impose. This master is Brontë's Christ, figured in line twenty-three as director of both the jailer, the prison and those held within. Nothing more than an unthinking despot, his false aspect, ostensibly "bland and kind" simply hides the "soul that lurks behind," "hard as hardest flint" (ll.25-26). This mysterious master seems to direct the jailer from within, entering into him like a disease, a "hidden ghost that has its home in me," the warder confesses, a crude Holy Ghost who vampirically feeds off his believing victims (l.28). He subsumes the prisoner in a similar fashion, appearing in cunning

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behind a window or door, but trapped within the frame of the painting.



visions which seems to offer freedom and light against the jailer's cruelty, but merely confuse her, exacerbating her enthusiasm.

For the captive, now crazed within the shadow of her cell, this Christ-master offers recompense for her incarceration, materializing as a messenger of the divinity for which she waits in stanza nine. While she repels the jailer's taunts with a "smile of almost scorn," the prisoner remains threatened by him as a despot who might restore the "lost life" she had in the mortal world, thus breaking her from Christ and the enthusiastic relations he grants her with God. As God's son, Christ provides a bridge between earth and heaven for the prisoner here, appearing to her as an angelic "messenger of Hope" who visits her every night, offering "eternal liberty" and coming with "western winds, with evening's wandering airs" (ll.34-37). Like Shelley's West Wind, a 'Destroyer and preserver' alike, the transcendent messenger offers sanctuary only to confound her thoughts and increase her frenzy, a figure for the enthusiastic sublime ('Ode to the West Wind,' l.14). Governing and controlling her, he seems to elevate the prisoner from the depths of the cell but drives her into a delirium from which she cannot recover, as Shelley's wind blows seeds into the air only to force them into enclosed spaces, 'Each like a corpse within its grave' (l.8). So too does his signification through the idea of 'Hope' endow him with the status of a false messiah. As the 1843 poem, 'Hope was but a timid Friend,' conveys, Hope is a cruel and villainous power for Brontë, incapable of curing the narrator of her 'frenzied pain' and, soaring 'to heaven | Went, and ne'er returned again' (ll.18-20).

The prisoner seems doomed, then, trusting in the "clear dusk of heaven" from which her Christ-messenger is blown, but killed "with desire" for the rising visions that confront her gaze (ll.38, 40). Enthusiastic feeling appears dangerous here, invoking within the captive a passion she cannot contain. She confesses that in her "maturer years" on earth she felt a similar degree of desire, but for "nothing known," an anonymous joy which pushed her into a madness she could not comprehend (ll.41-42). Now locked away in heaven, the source of her frenzy becomes clear in the form of the

messenger, a force which reduces her to the status of an infantile enthusiast, a 'slumbering unweaned child' far from the subject of "“maturer years”" presented in line forty-one (l.14). She thus conceives of Christ as that which inspires her deepest emotions, vigorously describing the state into which she enters when confronted by him. Read by many critics as Brontë's most complete account of the mystical experience, a point I discussed in chapter one, I suggest here that it records the frenzy of an enthusiast. Juliet Barker too recognizes that the state entered into by the prisoner is caused by an external force acting upon her mind (she suggests the imagination) rather than one coming from within as the mystic holds. For Barker, the fact that Brontë 'externalizes and personifies imagination as a visitant "God of Visions"' does not make her a mystic, particularly as the recipients of the visions in her poems are usually defeated or imprisoned Gondals.<sup>54</sup>

In short, the prisoner feels the intensity of God through Christ as enthusiasm because she is incarcerated, religious emotion forced onto her as a duped and mad figure rather than one who ecstatically summons God. What she recapitulates to the initial narrator is instead an encounter with the enthusiastic sublime: darkness, silence, an unfulfilled threat of danger imposed upon her by the external power of the messenger. First, the prisoner declares, "“a hush of peace – a soundless calm descends,”" halting the "“struggle of distress, and fierce impatience”" that haunted her existence on earth (ll.45-46). This earthly life which she is now so averse to had stunted her ability to truly feel the "“Mute music”" and "“unuttered harmony,”" she states, that in heaven prefigures the climactic frenzy of her enthusiastic disturbance (ll.47-48). Peaking in the dawning of "“the Invisible; the Unseen,”" the captive beholds the revealed truth of God, all "“outward sense”" leaving her and an "“inward essence”" replacing it, sublimity moving from direct apprehension into her imagination (ll.49-50). She feels at last within her "“home”" or "“harbour,”" daring "“the final bound”" of reaching God through this frenzy (ll.51-52). Her expression here is almost a paraphrase of Charles Wesley's hymn

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<sup>54</sup> Barker, *Brontës*, p.482.

‘Author of faith, eternal Word,’ as it too proclaims that ‘things unknown to feeble sense | Unseen by reason’s glimmering ray’ are only in ‘strong commanding evidence’ to the enthusiastic believer. Armed with a ‘Faith’ that ‘lends it realising light,’ the narrator of Wesley’s hymn sees ‘clouds disperse, the shadow’s fly; | Th’ Invisible appears in sight,’ witnessing ‘God’ through her ‘mortal eye.’<sup>55</sup> Like the prisoner’s narrative, Wesley’s hymn conceives of heaven as a place where God remains invisible to those who cling to earthly reason over heaven. Once enthusiastic, however, the believer’s dark world is enlightened and she, like Burke’s weak subject, is moved to delirium by the enthusiastic sublimity of her meeting with God.

Immersed within an enthusiastic frenzy, the prisoner is forced into a more intense sublime encounter, that which John Dennis might call ‘a pleasing rape’ but that inflicts pain upon the prisoner.<sup>56</sup> ““Oh, dreadful is the check – intense the agony,”” cries the prisoner as her senses accelerate into an extreme ardency wherein God is revealed to her: ““When the ear begins to hear, and the eye begins to see; | When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again”” (ll. 53-55). Most important in this unbridled disorder, however, is the prisoner’s growing consciousness of her imprisonment, directly enabled by the fact her brain is again active. As her ““soul”” begins to ““feel the flesh,”” the ““flesh [feels] the chain,”” and yet her enthusiasm numbs her to the point where any degree of torture, pain or anguish can be sustained in order to reach the final divine blessing from God (l.56). In her madness, the prisoner welcomes torment, the more intense her prostration before God the sooner she is granted benediction. Ebullient and crazed, she declares: ‘The more that anguish racks, the earlier it will bless,’ heralding in a vision which is revealed in stanza fifteen to be death itself: whether ““robed in fires of hell, or bright with heavenly shine,”” death is cherished here as a gift from God (l.59). Notably, the prisoner merges heaven and hell here, both realms controlled by God and so revelatory of his power. The captive is thus caught in a heaven which is actually hell.

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<sup>55</sup> Charles Wesley, ‘Hymn 92: Author of faith, eternal Word’ [1740], in *Collection of Hymns*, VII, pp.194-195 (ll.17-24).

<sup>56</sup> Dennis, ‘Criticism,’ p.37.



Brontë's rendering of heaven as hell in 'The Prisoner' mirrors the Methodist conception of hell, presented by John Wesley in his sermon 'Of Hell' (1788). For Wesley, there is 'no grandeur in the infernal region,' a series of 'dark abodes' where no light exists 'but that of livid flames' ('Of Hell,' p.34). Hell is 'one unvaried scene of horror upon horror,' a chamber where 'There is no music but that of groans and shrieks, of weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, of curses and blasphemies against God' (p.34). Those who lurk within 'are the heirs of shame and everlasting contempt,' separated from everything 'in the present world' (p.34). As Wesley declares, the 'inhabitants of earth are frequently diverted from attending to what is afflictive by the cheerful light of the sun, the vicissitudes of the seasons, "the busy hum of men," and a thousand objects that roll around them with endless variety' (p.41). The dwellers 'of hell,' however, 'have nothing to divert them from their torments even for a moment: "Total eclipse: no sun, no moon" no change of seasons or of companions' (p.41). 'They have,' Wesley insists, 'no interval of inattention or stupidity: they are all eye, all ear, all sense,' forever "'trembling alive all o'er,"' as they "'smart and agonise at every pore'" (p.41). 'Of this duration *there is no end!*' Wesley concludes, 'What a thought is this! Nothing but eternity is the term of their torment!' (p.41). Moreover, while 'Every suffering is softened if there is any hope, though distant, of deliverance from it,' in hell, "'Hope never comes, that comes to all' the inhabitants of the upper world! What, sufferings never do end!' (p.41).<sup>57</sup>

Wesley's sermon seems to provide a source-book for Brontë, as she employs many aspects of his hell in her recreation of heaven. Like Wesley's hell, Brontë's heaven is dark and gloomy, a scene of unspeakable sublime horrors where music is muted against the 'groans and shrieks' of the prisoners. Wesley's hell-dwellers are abused and disdained like the prisoner, one who has rejected the pleasures of earth, 'the present world,' as the preacher calls it, to be locked up in heaven. The sun and moon, so

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<sup>57</sup> Wesley's quotations are from, in order of appearance, Milton's *L'Allegro* l.118 (1631); Handel's *Samson: An Oratorio* (1742); Pope's *Essay on Man* (1732-4); and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), I. ll.66-67.

prominent in Brontë's other poems, are absent in 'The Prisoner' as in Wesley's hell, and eternal torment reigns in both spheres, inescapable and determined by God. The most prominent overlap between Wesley's hell and Brontë's heaven, however, is the experience of those who reside within, the preacher's damned subjects 'all eye, all ear, all sense' and Brontë's prisoner hearing, seeing and feeling as if for the first time. Both sets of inhabitants tremble and agonize over their plight, unable to hope for liberation: for those in hell "“Hope never comes”"; and for Brontë's prisoner, hope remains a cheating Christ who leaves her at the mercy of a severe God. While the sinners in Wesley's hell seem repentant, shamed and hopeless, however, Brontë's prisoner stands proud, expectant of atonement and smiling with scorn at her jailer and the first narrator who ultimately have 'no further power to work the captive woe' ('The Prisoner,' ll.61-62). The abrupt termination of the captive's frenzied address signals the end of her sublime and enthusiastic experience, and she is left in a strange and insensible condition, lying frozen in a state of delirium, her eyes gleaming like Heathcliff's, his 'frightful, life-like gaze of exultation' sneering in death (*WH*, p.332). As Heathcliff announces to Nelly just before his demise, 'I have nearly attained *my* heaven,' and the captive too nearly achieves hers, lifted from a 'sentence' on earth which is 'overruled by Heaven' so that it may enforce imprisonment instead (l.64).

The captive's desire to be united with God in 'The Prisoner' forces her into an enthusiastic experience from which she cannot recover, summoning only madness, a frenzied sublime and then death. Winched in by the enthusiastic sublime, Brontë's narrators are incapable of pulling away from it, drawn in by God and overwhelmed by his power. Where Brontë's narrators attempt to escape from this power and reach liberty, they consistently fail, reliant on God as the source of that passion and feeling which enables them to try and break from him. Liberty seems insurmountable for Brontë's narrators, and yet its force within the poetry is considerable, signalling to the reader that it might be achieved in another era free from religion. Charlotte stressed her

sister's love of liberty, believing Emily turned to the moors as an antidote to feelings of confinement, a realm where she 'found in the bleakest solitude many and dear delights; and not the least and best-loved was – liberty.'<sup>58</sup> Stevie Davies too deems liberty a sort of 'talismanic conjuring word' for Brontë, impelling the reader to recreate the world as a revolutionary force.<sup>59</sup> While Brontë clearly placed great import on liberty within her poetry, a sense of autonomy she endowed with the power to override an oppressive religious culture and the madness resulting from it, her anticipation of its fulfilment is distant. She did not invoke liberty like Shelley, for example, his 'Ode to Liberty' conceiving it as a whirlwind of change that forces 'Religion [to] veil[ ] her eyes' and 'Oppression [to] shrink[ ] aghast' (l.83).<sup>60</sup> Instead, liberty was an essential and yet removed idea for Brontë, and she equated it with the ocean as an image that conveyed feelings of autonomy and eternity. For Brontë, however, the realization of such liberty within her culture seemed impossible, deferred to another time wherein the power of religion has vanished.

The next and final section explores Brontë's positioning of the ocean as a symbol of liberty, a kind of oceanic feeling that has the capacity to counter enthusiastic frenzy. It fails in this objective, however, because Brontë wants to impart just how dominant religion is within her society, and thus defers liberty indefinitely. Catherine and Heathcliff manage to avoid heaven's prison, but the liberty they attain on earth is ghostly, unreal and supernatural, their union together supported by enthusiastic passion and so bound by religion. What follows are readings of poems which evoke and then defer liberty: 'There was a time when my cheek burned' (1839), 'In the earth, the earth thou shalt be laid' (1843) and 'His land shall burst the galling chain' (n.d.) desperate to

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<sup>58</sup> In Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* [1857], ed. Elisabeth Jay (London: Penguin, 1997), p.104; see also E. M. Delafield, *The Brontës: Their Lives Recorded by their Contemporaries* (England: Ian Hodgkins and Co., 1979), p.91.

<sup>59</sup> Davies, *Emily Brontë*, 1988, pp.18-19, 154.

<sup>60</sup> Shelley's glorious notion of liberty also awakens the subject to oppression by a materialist and religious society in 'An Ode to the Asserters of Liberty' (1818), provoking his reader to remember those who have suffered in their efforts to overthrow 'the revenge, pride and power' of tyrannical conquerors and autocrats (ll.23, 26-27). He too envisages liberty as a great leveller in 'Liberty' (1820), looking forward to a dawn



achieve freedom but finding such a task untenable; and ‘How beautiful the Earth is still,’ or ‘Anticipation’ (1845) envisaging liberty in a future time. I conclude this chapter with an analysis of the late poem ‘Why ask to know the date – the clime?’ (1846), a verse with a knowing opening intimative of the significance of geographical position and historical moment: Brontë’s Yorkshire irrevocably to be identified as productive of, and contained by, the spirit of Methodism. Amended after *Wuthering Heights* was written, the poem provides a point wherein Brontë’s major themes, enthusiasm, sublimity and imprisonment, converge. The abrupt close witnesses a frenzied enthusiasm several main characters experience, as I have argued, driven mad because betrayed by God and blocked from liberty by death.

### (iii) Liberty Deferred

In ‘Civilization and its Discontents,’ Freud writes of an acquaintance who posits ‘the true source of religious sentiments’ in ‘a peculiar feeling,’ a ‘sensation of “eternity”’ or ‘something limitless, unbounded,’ bringing ‘with it no assurance of personal immortality’ but remaining ‘the source of religious energy.’<sup>61</sup> Freud recognizes the feeling of tranquillity religion induces but claims he is unable to ‘discover this “oceanic” feeling in myself,’ deeming it a state of intoxication (p.252). Nothing more than a protection against reality, an ‘unconditional submission’ to God, he renders the ‘religions of mankind’ as ‘mass-delusions’ (pp.273, 269). Yet for Brontë, the oceanic conjured a kind of sublimity devoid of the terror religion invokes, a sensation that resembles an ‘energy’ more than ‘an article of faith’ (pp.251-252). Wesley too perceived the power of an oceanic sensibility as a threat to religion, writing in his sermon ‘On Eternity’ (1786), ‘as soon as the heavens and the earth flee away from the face of him

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where both ‘tyrants and slaves’ will appear as only memories, ‘shadows of night | In the van of the morning light’ (ll.20-21).

<sup>61</sup> The companion Freud refers to is Romain Rolland, in Sigmund Freud, ‘Civilization and its Discontents’ [1930], *Civilization, Society, Religion: Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents and Other*

that sitteth on the great white throne, time will be no more, but sink for ever into the ocean of eternity.’<sup>62</sup> The symbol of the ocean, then, summons religious passion free from gods or doctrines, Christian or otherwise, promising liberty to those who search for a spiritual feeling disconnected from worship in Church. For Brontë’s narrators, however, this promise is betrayed, the poet communicating the overwhelming presence of religious ideology in her time, and looking both to the past and future as points wherein liberty has been or can be realized. Liberty’s promise is lost in the poems below, the recreant concept of hope unreliable and selfish as in ‘The Prisoner,’ and so desire for change embittered and broken.

The narrator of ‘There was a time when my cheek burned,’ for example, mourns the days of her ‘ardent youth,’ in which she ‘would have given my life for truth | For truth, for right for liberty’ (ll.5-7). Reduced from an impassioned figure to one who can only ‘calmly hear and see,’ her disposition appears passive, beaten by the society around her (l.9). She spurns the vain and foolish in her newly composed frame of mind, conscious of her cruel society, ‘steeled’ to its ‘terror’ in the knowledge that the ‘same world will go rolling on’ (ll.10-18). Such a world is both ‘selfish and self-blinded’ to the errors it commits rife with religious hypocrisy, and forcing her into a state of solitude wherein she is alone, but distanced from the religious ideology in which she is confined (l.14). A similar mood is conveyed in a later poem, ‘In the earth, the earth thou shalt be laid,’ wherein two narrators debate the value of death as an escape route from their imprisoning culture. The first narrator derides the grave as a ‘cold, cold’ ‘resting place | Shut out from Joy and Liberty,’ sealed by ‘Black mould’ and serving only to alienate ‘all who loved thy living face’ (ll.9-10, 3, 11). While the second narrator counters these statements, asserting that it is the living world, rather than the tomb, that ‘is chill’ and superficial, her voice is callow, oblivious to the ‘heaven’ that ‘laughs’ over her and the ‘Earth’ that ‘never misses thee’ (ll.13, 19-20). Thus both speakers are stripped of their

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*Works*, 15 vols (London: Penguin Freud Library, 1991), XII, pp.251-340 (pp.251-252); further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text, and where necessary, signified by the title *Discontents*.

<sup>62</sup> Wesley, John, ‘Sermon 54: On Eternity’ [1786], in *Sermons II: 34-70*, II, pp.358-372 (p.360).

liberty: the first denied the company of the second (it is perhaps her 'worthy' heart which lies neglected at the end of the poem); and the now deceased narrator imprisoned in an unknown tomb (l.24).

Liberty is refused by religious society and pillaged by death in these two poems, always deferred away from the grasp of Brontë's narrators. In 'His land may burst the galling chain,' liberty teases the narrator, Gerald Exina, one time King of Gondal but now dishonourably deposed and imprisoned by Julius Brenzaida.<sup>63</sup> For Gerald's presently oppressed people, 'a thousand hopes remain,' but 'hope is dead for him,' imprisoned and awaiting death (ll.3-4). The ocean is evoked as a possible emblem of freedom, but is undermined as its 'wild waves' can only 'play at liberty,' blown 'solemnly' around by Gondal's 'tireless midnight hymn' and thus tormenting the incarcerated narrator (ll.6-8). The hymn's dominant presence in the poem, ringing 'through all [the] strings' of Gerald's heart and echoing 'Around his prison walls,' conveys the inevitable concurrence of religion with imprisonment (ll.9-10). While the speaker in 'There was a time when my cheek burned' adopts an obdurate pose, turned to stone by the bitter temptations she has learned to slight, Gerald is frozen in an unchanging 'realm of sunless snow,' a fixed and frozen place, from wherein words and hope have been banished (l.14). His soul is 'Made voicless by despair' so that he cannot even challenge the fate granted to him by God, resigned to the 'few years of captivity' he must endure before meeting his 'captive's tomb' (ll.15, 23-24). The poem closes by reminding the reader, 'Set is his sun of liberty,' to impose a denial of freedom within both earthly mortality and the immutable realm of the grave (l.21).

The idea that liberty has set like a sun in the previous poem may deny its culmination, but also allows for the possibility of its re-emergence in another dawning. 'How beautiful the Earth is still,' also entitled 'Anticipation,' directly addresses this by emphasizing the importance of looking towards '*What is to Be*,' a musing situated within the realm of the oceanic. The poem is divided into two narrations, the first

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<sup>63</sup> See Ratchford, *Gondal's Queen*, pp.98-99.



describing the latter's idealistic contemplation of liberty within the world: 'How beautiful the Earth is still | To thee, how full of Happiness' the first speaker begins (ll.1-2). This second narrator is 'little fraught with real ill | Or unreal phantoms of distress' like many of Brontë's speakers, and rather invests in the season of 'spring' as a symbol of new beginning (ll.3-4). She is more 'hopeful' than other speakers but remains haunted by a religious presence, here deemed "A thoughtful Spirit" who teaches her "That every phase of earthly joy | Must always fade and always cloy –" (ll.25-26). Aware of the oppressive tone of the Spirit's instruction, the second narrator confesses "This I foresaw," an advanced realization of religion's dominion upon earth and signalling her search for liberty elsewhere (l.27). For she ignores "The fleeting treacheries" of earth, a place which has betrayed its people by submitting to religion, and gazes beyond society and culture "To the enduring seas –" (ll.28, 32). Within the ocean she finds the liberty "Eternity" grants, casting her "anchor of Desire" there and seemingly replenished by the tranquil lull of the waves (ll.33-34).

The oceanic prevents the inertia many of Brontë's narrators feel prior to their enthusiastic experiences, and enables the narrator here to bypass religious frenzy and enter into a state wherein her spirit never tires of "of looking for *What is to Be*" (ll.35-36). Hope is no longer viewed as a deceptive force once within the oceanic, reinterpreted as a "Spell that glorifies" all "Nature's million mysteries" (ll.37, 39). It is as if this 'peculiar' religious feeling allows the narrator to see her world in a different manner, still imbued with a spiritual presence, but free from the oppressive Methodism enthusiasm indicates in other poems. The second narrator becomes strong enough "to undergo | What I am born to bear," gazing past worldly religious dominion to the calm expanse of the ocean (ll.43-44). She betrays her fear of "the darkness of the grave –," but bravely confronts it to indicate the injustice of such a "fate," closing her monologue with the resolution that she will "anticipate" her "Destiny" without fear (ll.46, 49, 51-52). Turning to a "Glad Comforter" figure to fortify such conviction, the reader is reminded of the God in 'No coward soul is mine,' a poem written the following

year and expressive of a deity free from the doctrines of organized religion as I noted in chapter two (l.45). As the narrator of the latter poem bravely faces the ‘world’s storm troubled sphere’ and ‘Heaven’s glories’ safe in the hands of her God, the second narrator in ‘Anticipation’ encounters the world and what lies after death embraced within the oceanic (ll.2-3). Liberty, then, seems attainable not on earth or in heaven but within one’s own consciousness, free from the pressures of sublimity and released into a boundless and unclouded zone.

‘Anticipation’ in some ways prefigures ‘No coward soul is mine,’ written seven months before and promising autonomy for those who may conceive of it outside a religious frame of reference. Brontë’s last dated poem, however, ‘Why ask to know the date – the clime?’ returns the reader to the theme of imprisonment in a horrific refusal of liberty ending once more in enthusiasm and madness. As I argue below, it provokes the reader to acknowledge freedom from oppression, political and religious, as that which must be coveted above all else. The narrator of an earlier verse, ‘The Old Stoic’ (1841) conveys a similar judgement, deeming ‘Riches,’ ‘Love’ and ‘Lust of Fame’ insignificant when held up against the liberty for which she prays and waits (ll.1-3). Desperate to escape the constraints of religious society, she only submits before God as a last resort: for ‘if I pray – the only prayer | That moves my lips’ is ““give me liberty”” (ll.5-6, 8). The narrator’s famous rejoinder to her God and reader that she longs only for ‘a chainless soul’ conveys a similar ‘courage to endure’ as one finds in ‘Anticipation’ (ll.11-12). More than freedom itself, deferred and, for Brontë perhaps, anachronistic, the narrator yearns for the stamina to wait until a time when liberty can be attained.

‘Honour’s Martyr’ (1844) makes a parallel suggestion in a powerful Gondal poem, addressed from one lover to another amidst their treacherous involvement in Julius Brenzaida’s despotic colonization of the island.<sup>64</sup> The narrator’s resounding cry, ‘Rebellion in its chosen time | May Freedom’s champion be,’ accents the necessity of

holding out for a point wherein one may achieve liberation, here from the deceit of Brenzaida's rule (ll.43-44). The overwhelming sense of betrayal inherent to the poem transcends the limits of a Gondal narrative, however, illuminating the position one assumes if inconstant to the dictations of any ruling power. The narrator renders her isolation in striking terms, repudiated, covertly sneered at and wished dead, and yet such insult pales against the possibility of being deemed a 'Traitor,' for 'From *that* word | All true beasts shrink away' (ll.33-34, 47-48). Remaining loyal to one's values is primary here, and while the narrator might seem 'false in others' eyes,' she stays 'faithful in my own,' a martyr to her own estimation of honour (ll.64-65). To deviate from what one holds 'within my breast,' as the narrator of 'No coward soul is mine' declares, results in consequences of formidable stature, cowardice, duplicity, enthusiasm and frenzy.

The pitfalls of such hypocrisy are reinforced in 'Why ask to know the date – the clime?', begun in 1846 and rewritten in 1848, the year of the European revolutions, as Davies notes.<sup>65</sup> The poem addresses the main themes I have discussed in both chapters on Brontë, presenting a horrific war chronicle in which enthusiasm, sublimity, imprisonment and the force of God's damnation are integral. Further, it emphasises the importance of one's historical moment, forcing us to ask why we should register the time or climate, even as such a query results in nothing more than 'mere words' (l.2). The apparent vacuity of the opening question causes Roper and Chitham to understand it as a statement revealing that 'time and place are unimportant' in the poem.<sup>66</sup> However, I would argue that the inquiry is only rendered futile by the repressive tone of the poem, the raging Gondal war blinding its partakers to the gravity of recognizing their historical moment. For those narrators who endure imprisonment and madness place significant weight on their climate in order that the nature of its tyranny might be remembered and rebelled against in a different time. The opening line, then, signals that the poem will highlight an era in which persecution governs, encouraging the reader to anticipate and

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<sup>64</sup> The narrator is Mary Douglas, addressing her lover, E. R. Gleneden; for further details see Ratchford, *Gondal's Queen*, p.102.

<sup>65</sup> Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë, Writers and their Work* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), p.29.



work for a future wherein liberation is taken for granted. As in the prison poems, the sense of subjugation and horror is paramount here, augmented by the narrator's inability to resist such an atmosphere as he becomes complicit with the war's violence and oppression. For Jonathan Wordsworth, the narrator is denied 'the chance to make things right, to rearrange the past' and reverse his terrible actions, providing the reader with a further incentive to transform what is not fixed, and find liberty in a prospective epoch.<sup>67</sup>

The poem's length invites a short summary of the plot, at times melodramatic but sustaining a tension which climaxes by focusing upon the madness of its characters. The narrator is a young soldier fighting in one of the Gondal wars, attracted to the chivalrous and just potential of battle, but corrupted and degraded by its terror. He depicts scenes wherein soldiers lie slaughtered to convey the intensity of the conflict, leading up to the capture and imprisonment of the enemy leader, whom the narrator is commanded to guard. Contaminated by the power he thus holds, like the warder in 'The Prisoner,' the narrator mistreats his captive, denying him sustenance and stealing jewellery from the weakened commander. While the narrator feels a degree of remorse for his conduct, he gives up the chance to atone by ignoring the prisoner's prayers and refusing him access to his child, who awaits a final union with her father. As he torments the child, a comrade arrives to inform the narrator that his own son has been taken by the rival forces, impelling him to submit before the prisoner and beg for mercy. The captive leader orders his troops to spare the boy, but dies doing so, damning the narrator irrevocably and leaving his daughter stranded and inflamed by the injustice of events. She is driven insane by the death of her father and her torture at the hands of the narrator, who, in turn, exits the poem embittered and despairing.

The theme of the narration, then, is the deplorable nature of war, and yet Brontë shapes this critique using religious language to fuse the two: religion, like war, is oppressive, destructive and maddening. The narrator immediately conflates religion

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<sup>66</sup> Roper and Chitham, *Poems*, p.271.

<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth, 'Wordsworth and the Poetry of Emily Brontë,' *Brontë Society Transactions*, 16 (1972), 85-100 (p.90).

with war by remarking on those soldiers' prayers which plead for the power to kill and abuse: 'Men knelt to God and worshipped crime, | And crushed the helpless' he states in the first stanza (ll.3-4). The autumn harvest this year, the narrator states, has gathered the crop of men's lives, the sword replacing the sickle and the fields a 'mire of tears and human gore' (l.18). Heaven, it seems, is much to blame for this misery. 'Heaven's pure rain,' dousing the fields to increase the crop, metaphorically communicates the wrath God imposes, a large harvest intimating mass murder (l.19). The narrator, drawn to the excitement and passion of combat, also paints himself as one touched by the frenzy of God:

Enthusiast – in a name delighting;  
 My alien sword I drew to free  
 One race, beneath two standards fighting,  
 For loyalty, and liberty – (ll.31-34).

Struggling to fight for liberty, but crushed by God's unruly power, the narrator joins the cruel war but becomes hardened to it, learning 'to wear | An iron front to terror's prayer' (ll.39-40). Moved by 'faces' staring from mass graves, he feels flashes 'of human love' but continues the aggression with his fellow soldiers, men of 'Strange courage, and strange weaknesses too,' defiant, but overpowered by the war in which they are caught (ll.47-48, 58). The soldiers thus resemble Brontë's enthusiastic believer, promised the rewards of heaven, but granted only bewilderment and insanity.

Victorious in a minor battle, the narrator's army capture their enemy's 'leader young,' 'Wounded, and weak and nearly dead,' begging his rivals to end his pain and kill him (ll.81, 83). The narrator and his comrades, however, ignore these cries, giving 'him life against his will' and sneering coldly at his invocations towards heaven for help (l.84). Mocking the dying commander, the soldiers caustically remind him that if he were poor, his 'dastard prayer' would be wasted on them and God; but for a rich man,

‘The pleasant privilege, to die – ’ might be granted (ll.93, 95). So too do they ridicule his imprisoned state, ‘Knowing’ how the rich and powerful ‘love to live secure’ (ll.99-101). The commander seems beaten, ‘wild and dim with agony – ’ and unable to ‘sustain | Degrading taunts, unhonoured pain’ (ll.105-106). His guards remain hostile, their own dead scattered around ‘his mansion’ and ‘pasture-land’ which are of no use to him within his ‘ghastly’ prison (ll.112-113, 124). Incarcerated like many of Brontë’s narrators, the defeated leader turns to God but encounters only the sublime as it is figured through the ‘full moon’ which beams ‘on his face | Through shivered glass’ (ll.121-122). As his frenzied prayers echo around the cell, he calls on God for mercy and justice, but becomes oblivious and deranged, unaware of the narrator’s brief absence wherein he searches for food and water. Rewarded only with icy water and stale food, the soldier’s nourishment is stained with a ‘stranger tinge of gory red,’ as if God’s bloody judgement has been called into effect by the prisoner, a ‘crimson’ hue cast over all the soldier touches (ll.200-201).

The narrator’s cruelty grows stronger as the poem moves on, a character ‘Scarcely conscious’ as he steals the leader’s ‘jewelled rings, and locket fair’ and breathing ‘words of such contempt’ that his memory is darkened as he recites the story (ll.143, 157). For as he recalls this terrible tale, the narrator seems still enthusiastic, praying maniacally to a God he knows will punish him and ‘Pleading in mortal agony’ to no effect (l.184). Returning to his narration, the soldier recounts his meeting with the imprisoned leader’s daughter while out seeking food, ‘a wretched child | With wasted cheek and ringlets wild’ (ll.202-203). A ‘shape of fear and misery,’ the little girl raises ‘her trembling hands’ to the narrator, entreating him to let her see her father (ll.205-206). At first, the soldier spurns ‘the piteous wretch,’ but, realizing that she may know where her ‘father’s gold’ is hidden, begins to abuse her, a fact betrayed by the prisoner who later attacks the narrator for ‘stabb[ing] my child’ (ll.207, 211, 237). Here, however, the narrator returns the father’s cries with barbarous ‘mocking moans,’ telling him to die (ll.214-215). The brutality of this scene is bluntly suspended by the arrival of a comrade with news of an



enemy attack in which many of the narrator's companions have been killed: 'Alas he cried sin gender sin. | For every soldier slain they've sworn | To hang up five [ ] ere morn' (ll.220-222). More pertinent still is the enemy's capture of the soldier's son, taken as a counter-hostage to the prisoner. As the roles between warden and captive are reversed, the narrator falls at the feet of his prisoner, appealing to him as leader of the enemy to spare his own child. The request is granted with remarkable grace, the commander refusing to cause his jailer 'equal woe,' calling on him to write a treaty exempting all infants from harm and signing it as his 'latest prayer' (ll.243, 246).

The young boy saved, the narrator pours gratitude upon a 'silent corpse,' the leader expiring with his 'sad face raised imploringly | To mercy's God,' a look that casts a 'glazing' frenzy over his eyes (ll.255-226, 228). It is as if the commander understands the futility of his prayers to God, crazed by the torture of his daughter and dismissed by both earth and heaven. Left broken and shamed, the narrator returns to the young girl he once harmed in order to 'rescue' her from the aftermath of her father's death and furious war that rages on (l.259). She too, however, is delirious with suffering, 'full of anguish wild' and hating the narrator 'like blackest hell' in a sharp act of defiance and strength (ll.260-261). He is compelled to free her under a 'moonless night,' the sublime darkness increasing the frantic intensity of her 'savage woe,' driving her into retreat away from humanity and God (ll.263-264). God remains omnipotent in this scene of murky persecution, enthusing the soldiers' prayers in battle; repudiating the benign commander's worship; indifferent to the children caught within war; and damning the narrator for his actions. God 'does repay and soon and well | The deeds that turn his earth to hell,' the narrator admits, but never intervenes or aids those who appeal to heaven's mercy (ll.172-173). It is the characters' need to subject themselves before a religious power, to obtain strength in battle or while imprisoned, which finally secures their demise. Like Brontë, they are imprisoned within an ideology that promises rewards to those who pray, but delivers only frustration and madness to its disciples.

Liberty remains absent and enthusiasm conquers: the young leader's frenzied prayer vacuous, his child delirious and the narrator damned.

My point in this chapter was to convey how Brontë's poetry constructs the prison space as a metaphorical image of religious oppression by which her narrator, even once physically freed, remains stifled. Locked up inside a dungeon or cell, the narrator invests in enthusiasm as a force potentially able to lift her mentally from imprisonment, but which, instead, propels her into a frenzied and deranged disposition. She thus feels the force of the enthusiastic sublime, her consciousness overawed by a repressive dungeon darkness that evokes religion's dominance and power in society. The sublime is exposed as a domain framed as much by religion as the material world, an enthusiastic realm ruled by a power resembling the Christian God. As I stated above, Brontë looks to a kind of oceanic feeling as that which might offer temporary respite from religious tyranny, but its potential is undeveloped within her verse, a concept more suited to the later nineteenth century of which Freud and William James are part. Brontë's poetry rather exposes a poet attracted to the passion of enthusiasm, but unable to distance herself from its Methodist frame, one in which she felt imprisoned and suppressed. As Ted Hughes writes in the poem 'Wuthering Heights,' comparing Sylvia Plath to Brontë:

You

Had all the liberties, having life.  
 The future had invested in you –  
 As you might say of a jewel  
 So brilliantly refracting  
 Every tint, where Emily had stared  
 Like a dying prisoner (ll.65-71).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ted Hughes, 'Wuthering Heights,' *Birthday Letters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp.59-61 (p.61).

For Hughes, Plath ‘had all the liberties’ and chances the future offered whereas Brontë did not, a ‘dying prisoner’ of a culture which suppressed her own ability to recognize the distinction of her vision. While she is unable to free herself from Christianity, it remains important, I think, to acknowledge the manner in which Brontë attempted to escape it, employing philosophical concept and religious doctrine alike within her poetry. Her affinity with enthusiasm, however, stopped her from fully deconstructing the religious orthodoxy she found so distasteful in her environment, unable to jettison a system that granted her passionate expression.

The theory outlined in this chapter, exemplifies, then, not only Brontë’s manipulation of Methodist rhetoric in an attempt to subvert Christian values, but her position as intellectual within religious ideology. Like Said’s thinker, Brontë works within that which she critiques, undermining a specifically Methodist religion through the enthusiastic expression with which it became associated. Her conception of enthusiasm, I argued, does not rely on popular notions of the idea, but on John Wesley’s discussions of it in sermons and letters; and her notions of hell and heaven have a specifically Methodist origin. Paradoxically caught within that which she targets in her poetry, Brontë’s thoughtful deconstruction of religion only partly succeeds. Few readers of Brontë’s poetry can ignore the bitter indictment she inflicts upon orthodox religion, and yet it remains entirely within the bounds of religious language, symbol, image and theme. This produces a poetical voice that is at once radical, excited and fervent in its dismissal of the Christian God; intellectual in its assimilation and reinterpretation of sermons and philosophical tracts; but always restrained by its religious frame of reference. Brontë’s inability to dismiss outright the religion against which the core of her poetry is poised to denounce renders her verse, I think, often confusing, repetitive and circular. Like Brontë’s narrator who enthusiastically strives to be free from her cell, but is beaten by the very expression of her zealous tone, the reader is consistently dashed in her desire for Brontë to repudiate the religion with which she seems so obviously uncomfortable.



By contrast, Rossetti's celebration of religious values generates a poetical articulation marked by clarity and aesthetic exuberance, particularly notable in her devotional verse. Serving to advocate High Church theology, rather than impugn Low Church values, Rossetti's verse is less combative than Brontë's. Where the latter wrangled with Christian belief, Rossetti was partisan to it, compatible with Victorian religious ideology and satisfied that the liberty Brontë struggled toward would be achieved in heaven. Rossetti's role as a thinker was tied to her duty as a Christian, and her intellectual activity appears clerical where Brontë's was retaliatory and on the margins. Moreover, while the reader must work hard to trace Brontë's references to contemporary intellectual ideas as purported by Wesley and Burke, she is liberated to locate Rossetti within an Oxford Movement founded upon theological pamphlets and printed sermons the poet had access to through her local church, as I suggest. I claim further that Rossetti offers the keys necessary for decoding the theological commentary in her verse through its very makeup, crowded by allusions to Tractarian liturgy. Pre-Raphaelite in its ornate phraseology, her poetical language is excessive in its portrayal of Gothic ritual, alluding to altar lights, crucifixes, candles, veils, lavish displays of flowers and the burning of incense. Such imagery indicates Rossetti's Christian allegiance to Tractarianism, fashioning a sacred church space within her poetry that, I argue, enables the reader to enter into a spiritual and meditative realm.

I interpret this realm as a silent study space in which the reader may ponder upon the theological discussion Rossetti initiates behind a surface of liturgical flourish. Behind such excess, however, lie Rossetti's notably reticent conceptions of theology and faith, withdrawn in accordance with the Tractarian ruling that the believer must reserve her faith, and thus the manner in which it is expressed. Much of the poet's religious commentary is veiled behind metaphor and rhetorical figure in this way, but, I argue, is illuminated when related to Oxford Movement doctrine and philosophy. By disclosing the devotional subject matter of her verse, the reader is liberated to observe its scholarly tone, instructing the reader with her religious opinions and understanding of doctrine.

Tractarianism all but required the believer to base her piety on a foundation of religious education as I discuss in the following chapter, hence justifying Rossetti's intellectual faith. Her poetry, then, forged a space which not only empowered the reader to think about religion, but drew attention to its thinking author, fluent in Tractarian theology and intent on communicating such knowledge. While such a stratagem may seem unconvincing to a current secular audience, disconcerted by Rossetti's Christian expression, it dazzled Victorian critics eager to recognize Rossetti as a devout lady of letters, respected theological critic and admired biblical scholar, as I noted in chapter one. Chapters four and five will expose those religious practices and doctrines her poetry and devotional prose elucidates, rendering Rossetti as a competent religious intellectual who assumed an almost clerical identity confined to the male, professorial chaplain.

### Rossetti's Ritualist Poetics

The purpose of this fourth chapter is to locate Rossetti as a thinker working within religion, rather than marginalized by its values, as Brontë was. While the latter forged her intellectual identity by attempting to manipulate a rhetoric of enthusiasm away from the Methodist frame in which she encountered it, Rossetti's intellect was grounded in her Tractarian faith. I suggest Rossetti's power as a thinker was enabled by her belief and consequent reading of Tractarian sermons, pamphlets and poetry, educating her in doctrine and theology and elevating her work above the pious effusions of the verbose hymn-writer.<sup>1</sup> I argue that she adopted an intellectual relationship to scripture and

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<sup>1</sup> Rossetti's status as a nineteenth-century intellectual is increasingly accepted by critics, convinced by her literary responses to Victorian politics, philosophy, aesthetics and, most importantly perhaps, religion. As I discussed in chapter one, many critics have been concerned to understand Rossetti's intellectual reactions to her cultural context, notably Antony Harrison, Jan Marsh, David Kent, P. G. Stanwood and Diane D'Amico, and few fail to place religion at the centre of such critical discussions, see Antony H. Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1988); Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1995); David A. Kent and P. G. Stanwood, *Selected Prose of Christina Rossetti* (London: Macmillan, 1998); Diane D'Amico, *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender and Time* (Louisiana: University of Louisiana Press, 1999). Harrison's study of Rossetti compares her intellectual ability to that of John Keble, John Henry Newman, Walter Pater and A. C. Swinburne, while Marsh's biography asserts her connections to prominent Tractarians, Pre-Raphaelites and poets. Kent and Stanwood's collection of Rossetti's prose demonstrates her intellectual status through extracts from her devotional writings and essays on Giacomo Leopardi, Francesco Petrarca and Dante Alighieri. That Rossetti was a Christian cannot be doubted, and yet her allegiance to Tractarianism remains an underdeveloped topic, often ignored in historical surveys of the Oxford Movement. John Shelton Reed's cultural examination of Anglo-Catholicism remains the only non-literary study noting Rossetti as a Tractarian, and religious historians frequently confine their commentary on women's involvement in the Movement to the study of sisterhoods, see John Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville and London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), pp.14, 138-9; he also lists 'In the Bleak Midwinter' as an enduring Anglo-Catholic hymn, p.74; Christina's sister Maria joined All Saints Sisterhood in 1873; see Frances Thomas, *Christina Rossetti: A Biography* (London: Virago, 1992), pp.293, 306; on sisterhoods, see also Peter F. Anson, *The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion* (London: SPCK, 1955); Walter L. Arnstein, 'The Great Victorian Convent Case,' *History Today*, 30 (1969), 46-50 and *Protestant Versus Catholic in Mid-Victorian England: Mr Newdegate and the Nuns* (London and Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982); Michael Cohen, 'Reform, Rescue and the Sisterhoods of Middlemarch,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 21 (1993), 89-109; Maria G. McClelland, 'The First Hull Mercy: A Nineteenth-Century Case Study,' *Recusant History*, 22:2 (1994), 199-221; Peter J. Manning, 'Wordsworth at St. Bees: Scandals, Sisterhoods and Wordsworth's Later Poetry,' *English Literary History*, 52:1 (1985), 33-58; Susan Mumm, "'Not Worse than Other Girls': The Convent Based Rehabilitation of Fallen Women in Victorian Britain,' *Journal of Social History*, 29:3 (1996), 527-546;



religious debate such as that promoted by the university-educated founders of the Oxford Movement. These theologians privileged the role of the intellect within faith where Wesley had underplayed it and thus provoked Brontë to reject Christian values. The Movement even looked back to a pre-Methodist Reformation and Counter-Reformation emphasis on the individual grappling with the themes and ideas of scripture in its Hebrew, Greek and Latin vernacular versions. Intuitive faith in God always remained foremost for the Tractarians, but an intellectual grasp of what they believed separated them from Low Church Christians like Brontë's father, considered naively reliant on faith alone.

I locate Rossetti within Tractarianism in this chapter by focusing on her interest in its ceremonial ritual as recorded in her devotional poetry and prose. The ritual atmosphere of the Tractarian church, supernatural, spiritual and symbolic, presupposed the interpretive capacity of those who worshipped within, I suggest. Rossetti's own church, Christ Church, Albany Street in London, employed an intense medieval ceremony which complemented the profound sermonizing of those who preached there such as William Dodsworth, Henry Manning and Edward Bouverie Pusey. It is my argument that Rossetti's poetry constantly refers to ritualism, recreating the medieval milieu of the High Church ceremony as it appeared in Christ Church and elsewhere within her poetry. Rossetti's ritual poems thus evoke a kind of silent study space, shaping an intense and profound realm in which the believer can think. Encouraging the Christian to understand and contemplate, as well as reserve, that which she believed in, as I argue in chapter five, Rossetti assumed an intellectual identity parallel to that of the clergyman, rather than the challenging and oppositional role Brontë assumed. Guiding

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David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: A Study of the Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (London: John Murray, 1966), pp.379ff; Peter Benedict Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.189-90; Susan O' Brien, 'Terra Incognita: The Nun in Nineteenth-Century England,' *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), 110-140; Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, pp.50-51, 201ff; and Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (London: Virago Press, 1985), in particular chapter two, 'Church Communities: Sisterhoods and Deaconesses' Houses,' pp.46-84; Vicinus attributes the nineteenth-century establishment of Protestant sisterhoods in Britain to Newman and Pusey; the

the believer in the practice of a thoughtful faith, Rossetti composed several instructional manuals, *Annus Domini* (1874), *Seek and Find* (1879), *Called To Be Saints* (1881), *Letter and Spirit* (1883), *Time Flies* (1885) and *The Face of the Deep* (1892).<sup>2</sup> Printed variously by James Parker and Company, publisher of the *Tracts for the Times*, and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, the books appeared as educative primers in scripture, prayer and biblical exegesis. Rossetti's devotional poetry is equally instructive, as I argue, notably collected in the popular *Verses* (1893), from which I predominantly quote, but appearing also in *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862), *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866) and *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881), collections to which I also refer.<sup>3</sup>

I argue here that this poetry and prose reveals a writer concerned, not simply to teach her readers the value of Christianity, but to convey the benefits of a Tractarian belief-system, traditional, intellectual and ritualistic. Part I of this chapter, 'The Oxford Movement: An Intellectual Faith,' establishes Tractarianism in this way, constructing it as an intellectual faith available to female believers as well as men. I focus on Richard Frederick Littledale's *The Religious Education of Women* (1873), a Tractarian pamphlet in support of women's intellectual ability issued just one year before Rossetti's first prose publication. Emerging from the Oxford Movement's positioning of women as church goers and conventual sisters independent from the Victorian family, *Religious*

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foundation of such religious institutions allowed educated women to be trained as nurses, teachers and moral guardians of Victorian society.

<sup>2</sup> Rossetti's first devotional prose-piece was *Annus Domini: A Prayer for Each Day of the Year, founded on a Text of Holy Scripture* (1874) offering the reader a collect for every day of the year, each beginning with a scriptural text. *Seek and Find: A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite* (1879) followed, focusing on those creations listed in the *Book of Common Prayer's* Benedicite and reading them, first, as reminders of God's omnipotence, and second, as warnings that one should submit before such power. Rossetti's hagiographic study, *Called To Be Saints: The Minor Festivals Devotionally Studied* (1881), granted the reader both a study of the black-letter saints and an analysis of analogy and typology, where *Letter and Spirit: Notes on the Commandments* (1883) explored God's law as expressed through the commandments and related references to scripture. *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (1885) collected Rossetti's personal thoughts on religious belief and spirituality; and *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1892) proved her ability as an exceptional biblical commentator.

<sup>3</sup> Diane D'Amico notes that by 1912 twenty-one thousand copies of *Verses* had been printed; she also notes that *Time Flies* sold seven thousand copies in the nineteenth century alone and that *The Face of the Deep* went through six editions, in *Faith, Gender and Time*, p.148.

*Education* was radically suggestive for Rossetti.<sup>4</sup> I argue further that it conformed with her ideas about women deriving knowledge from religious study, informing the poet's support for Eve's originary, and exemplary, desire to consume knowledge. For Rossetti, ritual set the scene for religious study, producing a contemplative state in the reader, and indicating important ceremonial procedures such as those discussed in Part II.

Part II, 'Ritualism,' then, turns to ritualism itself, the practice of medieval and Catholic ceremonial in the Church of England. Ritual was signified through a Gothic liturgy evinced by altar lights, candles, veils, flowers and the burning of incense.<sup>5</sup> Inherent in Rossetti's poetry, ritual imagery invites the reader into a quiet and meditative study space in which they will appreciate her references to Tractarian theology, and therefore, recognize both the poet's belief and her intellectual grasp of faith's foundations. I thus outline ritualism's ceremonial implications, and trace Rossetti's relation to it through the figure of Pusey whom she encountered at Christ Church. I argue that Rossetti's adolescent 'breakdown' may be attributed to her practice of an obsessive faith fashioned after Pusey's, which caused her to feel intense guilt and unworthiness she was too young to fully understand. Rossetti thus exemplified the youthful Christian woman seduced by ritual's mystery, only later maturing into the religious intellectual who endeavoured to educate herself as a Tractarian theologian.

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<sup>4</sup> Kent and Stanwood, *Selected Prose*, p.377fn.24; they argue: 'Rossetti undoubtedly would have read and been affected by essays [Littledale] published in the *Contemporary Review*, especially "The Religious Education of Women," 20 (1872), 1-26, and "The Pantheistic Factor in Christian Thought," 30 (1877), 642-60.'

<sup>5</sup> Walter Walsh, a scathing critic of the Oxford Movement, includes an appendix on 'What the Ritualists Teach,' in the popular edition of his immensely sensational *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1899), pp.261-293; within it, he includes a section called 'Some Ritualistic "Ornaments of the Church,"' quoted from the *Directorium Anglicanum*, and expressive of what characterized a 'ritualistic church': An Altar with Super Altar; An Altar Cross or Crucifix; A Super-Frontal; Corporal; Burse; Chalice Veil; A Canister for Wafers; A Spoon; A Perforated Spoon; A Chalice Cover and Lace for Veiling the Blessed Sacrament; Ciborium; Maniples; Ampulla; An Aumbyre; A Triptych; Pede Cloth; Houselling Cloth; Corona; Rood Screen; A Scallop Shell; A Baptismal; A Water Bucket; A Baptismal Cruet; Paintings and Images of Our Lord, Our Lady, and Saints; A Portable Altar; Altar Bread Cutters; Altar Bread Irons; Altar Canistar; Two Standard Candlesticks; Flower Vases; Processional Candlesticks; Torches; Lanthorns; Cantoral Staves; Amice (for an Archbishop or Bishop); Alb; Maniple; Stole; Dalmatic; Girdle; Tunic; Zucchetto; Biretta; Chasuble; Cope; Grey Amyss; Buskins; Sandals; Subcingulum; Pectoral Cross; Tunic; Mitre; Crozier; Gremial; The Cappa Magna; The Pall; most references to Walsh's study here will be to the longer, primary edition, *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1898).



Part III, 'A Ritual Poetics,' examines Rossetti's general poetical employment of ritual imagery in her writing, noting her lavish use of candles, veils and so on. I concentrate specifically on three ideas which enhance and enforce the feeling of ritual within her poetry: crucifixes, the invocation of saints and prayers for the dead. While hagiography and prayer are not rituals as such, I suggest that Rossetti reconstructs the litany of the saints and memorial mass of prayers for the dead to impose a ritualized atmosphere. Such ritual adorned her poetry as it embellished the Tractarian church, and enabled the reader to intensify apparently simple verses with theological references to ceremonial practice. Most importantly, ritual produced a space in which the reader might consider her own faith intellectually, both physically, inside the church and mentally, as a reader of Rossetti's poetry. Where intellect and faith may appear at odds, Rossetti fuses the two in order to record the details of her faith: Tractarian, and so invested in a scholarly appreciation of religion. The intellect may subside when confronted by Christian beliefs, and yet without it, Rossetti continually emphasizes, the complex belief-system of the Tractarian Anglicans collapses. Embracing ritual within her poetry, Rossetti simultaneously indicated her intellectual and Tractarian identity, a manoeuvre which I discuss below.

## **I      The Oxford Movement: An Intellectual Faith**

The Oxford Movement was initiated to reinstate High Church principles within the Church of England, defending that church as a divine rather than purely state-controlled institution. Looking back to a Laudian and medieval Catholicism, rather than an Italianate Roman Catholicism, Tractarianism forged a theology wherein the believer could be Catholic within the Church of England. Oxford based and led by university men, the Movement was rooted in an intellectual apprehension of the scriptures; worship and prayer remaining paramount, but practised in accordance with High Church theological law. The Movement's scholarly foundation rendered it an antiquarian and

academic belief-system, earning it the nickname 'British Museum religion.'<sup>6</sup> The assumed intellectual nature of the Oxford Movement is not extended to its female members, however, who are deemed devout and pious protectors of the faith rather than sharp champions of its doctrines and debates. While many Tractarians were content to assume a non-intellectual role within their faith, Rossetti consciously chose to fashion herself as a devout woman of letters, so securing her association with a Movement that warranted an intellectual appreciation of religion. By recognizing the religious questions Rossetti addresses, the reader may begin to discern more than 'rare glimpse[s] of her intellectual leanings,' and so determine her sophisticated approaches to doctrinal debates assumed to be dominated by male thinkers.<sup>7</sup> Such thinkers included John Keble, John Henry Newman, Edward Bouverie Pusey and Isaac Williams, figures always referenced in discussions of Tractarian poetics and doctrine, and who influence Rossetti's work to varying degrees as I discuss.<sup>8</sup>

Tractarianism valued the intellect because it enabled the believer to understand the medieval tradition it considered the *Thirty-Nine Articles* (1563) to have removed the Church of England from. The intellect, while always secondary to faith, enabled true belief, as Newman wrote to Joseph Blanco White in 1828: intellect, he stated, was 'but the attendant and servant of right and moral feeling in this our weak and dark state of being, defending it when attacked, accounting for it, and explaining it in a poor way to

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<sup>6</sup> Nigel Yates, *Buildings, Faith and Worship: The Liturgical Arrangement of Anglican Churches 1600-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp.144-145; the accusation was based on the Movement's apparent desire to return to medievalist ceremonial, whereas its main interest was in fact the Laudian Church of the seventeenth century and antiquity over medieval Christendom, concerned more with the latter's architecture than its doctrine; for more on this subject, see Raymond Chapman, 'Last Enchantments: Medievalism and the Early Anglo-Catholic Movement,' *Studies in Medievalism*, 4 (1992), 170-186.

<sup>7</sup> P. G. Stanwood, 'Christina Rossetti's Devotional Prose,' *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David Kent (London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp.231-247 (p.234).

<sup>8</sup> Other nineteenth-century women poets are beginning to be recognized in terms of Tractarianism, particularly Charlotte M. Yonge and Adelaide Anne Procter; see Georgina Battiscombe, *Charlotte Mary Yonge: The Story of an Uneventful Life* (London: Constable and Co, 1943); Barbara Dennis, *Charlotte Yonge 1823-1901: Novelist of the Oxford Movement: A Literature of Victorian Culture and Society* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1992); and Gill Gregory, *The Life and Work of Adelaide Procter: Poetry, Feminism and Fathers* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); see also Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.337.

others.’<sup>9</sup> As a university movement, the Tractarians were bound to their academic origins and became widely respected by High Churchmen for reuniting the church with scholarly thought after the philosophically and ethically barren Protestantism of the eighteenth century. The Movement considered such Protestantism to be backward and incompetent, disrespectful of religious mystery because intellectually unable to understand how to deal with it.<sup>10</sup> As one *Church Times* reporter informed his readers in 1866, commenting on an anti-Ritualist meeting at Exeter Hall: what a ‘miserable thing Protestantism has become [ . . . ] I do not suppose there were half-a-dozen really intelligent people in the body of the hall [ . . . ] A more contemptible, unintellectual-looking, seedy set of men and women I never saw collected together.’<sup>11</sup> Brontë would probably have agreed, seeking always to undermine a Low Church religion she experienced as a system that restricted intellectual freedom. In turn, ritualism was disliked by the Low Church, seen as veiling religious truths thought to be open to Christians of all denominations. The Tractarians argued, however, that such liberalism could, and had in the past, led the church into ruin. They wished to reform the Church of England by returning to the religious traditions of the medieval church as Archbishop Laud had done, emphasizing intellectual, as well as devotional, labour as the path to religious truth. As Edward Shils reminds us: ‘Intellectual work arose from religious preoccupations.’<sup>12</sup>

Newman believed that Keble’s 1833 Assize Sermon on ‘National Apostasy’ marked the beginning of the Oxford Movement, positioning the Church of England as an

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<sup>9</sup> John Henry Newman, letter to Joseph Blanco White, 1 March 1828, in Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, p.89.

<sup>10</sup> Newman valued his intellectual ability to outsmart the opposition, confessing: ‘I was not unwilling to draw an opponent on step by step, by virtue of his own opinions, to the brink of some intellectual absurdity, and leave him to get back as he could,’ in John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua* [1864], ed. Ian Ker (London: Penguin, 1994), p.58; see also Joseph J. Reilly, *Newman as Man of Letters* (London: Macmillan, 1925).

<sup>11</sup> *Church Times*, 19 May 1866, in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.184.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Shils, *The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), p.16.



eroded and unspiritual institution.<sup>13</sup> Keble's stress on 'apostasy' demanded church reform, pushing the Church of England back to a Laudian sense of medieval Catholicism.<sup>14</sup> The Roman Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 precipitated an increasing interest in Catholic ideas by the Oxford Movement, who forcefully called for the reassertion of the supernatural authority of the church and for the validity of sacramental grace, apostolical succession and auricular confession.<sup>15</sup> The proponents of these ideals wished to stir up the church to rescue it from its position of confusion and decay, described by the High Church William Gladstone as 'bad beyond all parallel known to me in experience or reading.'<sup>16</sup> Rossetti too stated in *The Face of the Deep*: 'Already in England (not to glance at other countries) the signs of the times are ominous: Sunday is being diverted by some to business, by others to pleasure; Church congregations are often meagre, and so services are chilled. Our solemn feasts languish,

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<sup>13</sup> Keble also denounced Erastianism, or the intervention of the State within Church matters, currently apparent within the Whig Government's Irish Church Temporalities Bill of 1833, which proposed to reconstitute the Irish Church. Such intervention was thought to be shocking and sacrilegious by most High Churchmen and Keble declared: 'There was once here a glorious Church, but it was betrayed into the hands of libertines for the real or affected love of a little temporary peace and good order.' (Erastianism is named after the Swiss theologian Thomas Erastus (1524-1583) who professed that in a State holding but one religion, the civil authorities must be legally bound to exercise jurisdiction in both ecclesiastical and state matters.) For Keble, Britain was 'fast becoming hostile to the Church, and cannot, therefore, be the friend of God' unless the country as a whole becomes 'nationally responsible for the meaning and temper in which we deal with His Holy Church, established among us for the salvation of our souls – is Apostasy too hard a word to describe the temper of the nation?' in John Keble, *The Assize Sermon on 'National Apostasy'*, Oxford Movement Centenary preached by the Rev. J. Keble in St. Mary's Church at Oxford on July 14 1833; reprinted with report of the service and historical introduction by the Rev. R. J. E. Boggis B. D. Vicar of St. John's, Torquay (Torquay: Devonshire Press, n.d.), in *Bodleian Pamphlets on Church Finance* 23 (1850-1935), pp.7, 18, 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> The High Churchman, Henry Hadley Norris, agreed, wishing to label the members of this church 'Reformed Catholic,' Henry Hadley Norris, letter to R. Churton, 30 September 1812, in Nockles, *Oxford Movement*, p.154; this, Hadley argued, would place one 'in a central position from which the Papist and the larger portion of that mixed multitude known by the name of Protestant diverge, in opposite directions indeed but to equal distance.'

<sup>15</sup> James' Bible and the subsequent Laudian attempt to claim to be the Apostolic Church of Europe addressed the same problem in the seventeenth century. The Church of England's claim to Catholic tradition since Elizabeth's reign, however, is always difficult because of *The Thirty-Nine Articles* (1563) which firmly locates this Church within an essentially Calvinist theology.

<sup>16</sup> William Gladstone, 'The Church of England and Ritualism,' *Contemporary Review*, 24 (1874), in Michael H. Bright, 'English Literary Romanticism and the Oxford Movement,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40:3 (1979), 385-404 (pp.398-9); Gladstone also submitted that: 'Taking together the expulsion of the poor and labouring classes (especially from the town churches), the mutilations and blockages of the fabrics, the baldness of the service, the elaborate horrors of the so-called music, with the jargon of parts contrived to exhibit the powers of every village roarer, and to prevent all congregational singing; and

and our fasts where are they?' (p.243). Like Gladstone, Rossetti called for an infusion of something new and vibrant into the church, attracted, as the Pre-Raphaelites were for more aesthetic reasons, to the sensuous atmosphere of medieval ceremony.

The Oxford Movement returned to such medievalism by seeking to reinstate six main ideas: first, the use of sacraments or religious ceremony within the church; second, episcopacy, or the governing of the church by bishops; third, the idea that the church formed a 'body' in which all believers were linked to Christ; fourth, religious rites or ordinances, such as daily prayers and fasting; fifth, visible devotion, that is conveying one's faith through adorning and decorating the church; and sixth, the promotion of medieval ceremony over the Calvinist theology presently marking the Church of England.<sup>17</sup> The Tractarians outlined such propositions in ninety *Tracts for the Times* (1833-1841), comprising of new compositions by thinkers such as Newman, Keble, Pusey and Williams, and reprinted works by seventeenth-century theologians.<sup>18</sup> The Tract writers were united in their desire, as Arthur West Haddan claimed, to lift 'the bulk of the Church [ . . . ] into a more substantial orthodoxy,' that is, one based on a medieval ceremonial that encouraged the Christian to think and contemplate what she

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above all, the coldness and indifference of the lounging or sleeping congregations, our services were probably without a parallel in the world for their debaseness [sic].'

<sup>17</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960), p.51; much of this was popular with High Churchmen who welcomed any rejuvenation of the Christian Church: the *Christian Remembrancer* stated in 1841: 'with the earlier numbers of [the Tracts] the great mass of the clergy fully agreed. They were glad to find men bold enough to advance opinions which they themselves had always implicitly received [ . . . ] In the very moment when they were calling upon the church to abandon her established principles, at this very moment arose a company of men, strong in knowledge, faith and self-denial, who proved, in a manner which could not be questioned, that those truths instead of being abandoned, needed only to be acted upon,' in *Christian Remembrancer*, New Series, 1 (April, 1841), in Nockles, *Oxford Movement*, p.275; the Roman Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 also precipitated an increasing interest in Catholic ideas.

<sup>18</sup> Ninety Tracts were written between 1833 and 1841, twenty-nine by Newman, eight by Keble, seven by Pusey and many others by various Oxford men including Froude and Williams. Some of the Tracts, including James Ussher's essay on 'Prayers for the Dead,' were not new compositions, being reprinted from the works of past writers (mostly from the seventeenth century), from Catenas and from biblical commentaries by the Anglican divines. Only Newman's Tract 90 of 1841, 'Remarks on Certain Passages in the *Thirty-Nine Articles*,' pushed both ecclesiastical and public opinion too far by declaring that the thirty-nine articles were not contradictory to the doctrines of Roman Catholicism, an argument interpreted as a sly attempt to Romanize the Church of England. Aware of the consistent charge of Popery directed at the Movement, Pusey argued that the accusation only stood if the reader took the Tracts in excess of what was actually being stated and indeed, much was exaggerated by an extreme Protestant opposition and their supporters in order to sustain a forced critique.

believed.<sup>19</sup> By doing so, the believer enters into the kind of silent study space I propose Rossetti's ritual poetry creates, central to her intellectual relationship with faith, and emphasized through the meditative and thoughtful genre of prayer.

Many of Rossetti's prayers defend intellectualism as an ideal route to God and her rare questioning of the learning process has a token feel to it, as if she foresees and then dismisses anti-intellectual argumentation. Her interpretation of Ecclesiastes 12. 12 in *Letter and Spirit*, for example, in which the preacher instructs that 'of making many books there is no end,' underplays the more alarming tones of the verse, conceding its message while making little of it (*LS*, p.87). So too in *Seek and Find*, while Rossetti cites I Corinthians 8. 1, its suggestion that 'knowledge oftentimes puffeth up' is all but ignored (*SF*, p.198).<sup>20</sup> Rossetti instead focused on the intellect as a tool for praising God. She asks him in Prayer 234 of *Annus Domini* to encourage the believer to worship 'with all prostration of heart and intellect'; and in Prayer 347 entreats God to 'subject our hearts and desires, wills and intellects to the teaching of the Holy Ghost.' Prayer 237 even begs that those 'of deficient or darkened intellect' are looked on with mercy by God and that he 'keep haunting terrors far from them' and 'forgive their involuntary trespasses and errors, and all their offences.' For Rossetti, those of 'darkened intellect' must be 'illuminated' with the knowledge of God, as she declares in Prayer 270. She further urges the believer to pray for 'grace to study and meditate' the 'holy written word' in Prayer 314. As Rossetti argues in *Time Flies*, there is no excuse not to study and write about God: if 'we cannot summon up anything original, or striking, or picturesque, or eloquent, or brilliant' it remains that the 'glorification of our Heavenly Father' is always 'set before us [ . . . ] worthy of meditation [and] worthy of exposition' (January 27; p.22). Intellect, then, is essential to comprehend God and while the 'starry heavens' address only some 'through the intellect exclusively,' Christians of all

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<sup>19</sup> Arthur West Haddan, 'On Party Spirit in the English Church' (1861), in Nockles, *Oxford Movement*, p.322.

<sup>20</sup> Ecclesiastes informs the reader that 'much study is a weariness of the flesh' (12. 12), Corinthians continues into a more dogmatic 'And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know' (I. 8. 1)



generations are instructed to contemplate the 'Perfection of our dear Lord' in intellectual terms, the Epistle 'written in our very hearts' as well as being 'known and read' (emphasis mine; *TF*, January 7, p.7; *LS*, p.200).

The acquirement of a body of religious knowledge, then, is presented as the key to God, and Rossetti stresses that the capacity to learn and understand such knowledge is already 'shrined within mortal man' (*SF*, p.27). The sentiment that 'Deep only can call to deep' suggests that only the intellectually persistent 'enquiring mind of faith' can fathom the depths of God's mysteries (*SF*, pp.36, 151). While the nineteenth century still struggled to provide women with adequate learning resources, women's acquisition of religious knowledge was encouraged by Tractarianism, particularly through writers such as Littledale, as I discuss below. Rossetti too looked to writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More, both of whom identified religious study as the pinnacle of women's education.<sup>21</sup> In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), for example, Wollstonecraft argued that religion was an essential part of a young woman's 'intellectual improvement,' upon which her 'comfort and happiness' depended.<sup>22</sup> Adopting the sermon-like tone of a preacher (and refusing to apologize for it), Wollstonecraft commanded her readership to attend 'the ceremonials of religion,' observe Sunday worship and improve themselves by reading 'books of hymns.'<sup>23</sup> Similarly, More directly linked intellectual labour and religious faith in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) by stating: 'Serious study serves to harden the mind for more trying conflicts' by lifting 'the reader from sensation to intellect' and thus helping to 'qualify her for religious pursuits.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ellen Moers notes that 'Hannah More, who was called the She-Bishop in petticoats, pronounced herself "invincibly resolved" never to read Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*,' and yet their ideas on a female religious education were remarkably similar, in *Literary Women*, intro. Helen Taylor (London: The Women's Press, 1978), p.125.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with Reflections on Female Conduct, in the more Important Duties of Life* [1787], in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols (New York: New York University Press, 1989), IV, pp.1-49 (p.33).

<sup>23</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Education of Daughters*, pp.35, 38, 40, 10.

<sup>24</sup> Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education: with a View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent Among Women of Rank and Fortune* [1799], in, Donna Landry, *The Muses of*

Religious education, then, granted women a strength of mind, a forceful passion and sense of independence that served to threaten the submissive domesticity of the female sphere, causing Ruskin to grumble: 'There *is* one dangerous science for women – one which let them indeed beware how they profanely touch – that of theology.'<sup>25</sup> Ruskin's condemnation of religious education for women, here quoted from 'Of Queen's Gardens' (1871), was couched within a theory of female learning reconciled with 'true wifely subjection' and thus denied the female student any intellectual autonomy.<sup>26</sup> Littledale's *The Religious Education of Women* (1865) instead analysed the present state of women's education as a superficial system, failing to engage women's intellect at all and abandoning them in a state of simplistic piety beneficial in the marriage-market rather than in church.<sup>27</sup> As I argue that Brontë and Rossetti approach religion as intellectuals rather than unthinking believers, Littledale demanded, in opposition to Ruskin, that all women assume an independent and intellectual role within the church as strong, thinking Christians. He argued that education must develop women's minds in order that they join the church as contemplative individuals. Women will become 'the intellectual rivals of men' once they are educated with 'anything and everything for which they have bent or capacity,' wrote Littledale, asserting (if condescendingly) women's right to an intellectual status within society.<sup>28</sup>

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*Resistance: Labouring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain 1739-1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.258.

<sup>25</sup> John Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens' [1865], *Sesame and Lilies, Unto This Last and The Political Economy of Art* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1907), p.78.

<sup>26</sup> Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens,' p.72.

<sup>27</sup> See Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.417; and Kent and Stanwood, *Selected Prose*, p.6; Rossetti read and probably discussed the pamphlet with her Tractarian friend, Littledale, just as at his request she wrote the poem 'The Master is Come, and Callest thee' to aid women entering the noviciate; Kent and Stanwood contend that Littledale and Rossetti's notions of scripture serve to further confirm their intellectual union, p.377fn.24; Rossetti also alludes to Littledale as a friend offering advice in a marginal annotation of a copy of *Time Flies* held at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin (*TF*, March 28, p.61), p.393fn195.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Frederick Littledale, *The Religious Education of Women* (London: Henry S. King and Co., 1873), pp.3-4; further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text, and where necessary, signified by the title *Religious Education*; the pamphlet was first published in the *Contemporary Review*, 20 (1872), 1-26; Littledale notably raised Elizabeth Barrett Browning as one of the 'most gifted women

Littledale claimed that the ‘very low standard of female education’ in the nineteenth century was not due to ‘any inherent defect in women,’ but the fault of a neglectful society which deemed religion a mere ‘safety-valve for the emotional and affective side of women’ (pp.3, 5). He ‘profoundly dissent[ed]’ from the idea that religion served only to deepen women’s ‘tendency to patient self-sacrifice, to encourage them in a condition of passive receptivity, and, above all to make them so domestic in habits and wishes as to limit their entire horizon by the boundaries of home, and to make them glad and proud to be the dependants and humble assistants of men’ (pp.5-6). If religion merely provides ‘an adjunct to music and dancing, in order to tempt men into an investment,’ then it suppresses the development of women’s ‘individual character’ and thus ‘counteracts the purpose of God’ (pp.6, 11). Christian women are, Littledale contended, ‘strong, true, liberal, wise and just, no mere foolish virgins with amiable intentions and expiring lamps’ (p.15). Indulgent piety and sentimentality, Littledale argued, could be quickly dispersed by the engagement of the female believer with ‘more exact studies’ (p.20).

Littledale even contended that women could achieve an intellectual status more quickly than men through the acquirement of religious knowledge, ‘less tied down by precedent’ and thus ‘more capable of rapidly assimilating’ ideas and facts (p.23-24). The ‘time is past,’ Littledale contended, ‘for treating religion as an agency for turning women into devout simpletons,’ noting that ‘we shall more and more need what the Americans call “facultized” women. Not merely capable women, educated women, clever women, but such as have had capacity trained into practical efficiency and decisiveness’ (p.25). Similar to the image of woman given in Proverbs 31, capable of looking after the family, husband, household and business, Littledale’s woman is also intellectual and thus best suited to direct the future of the church alongside the men who

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our time or any time has seen’ in *Religious Education*, quoting from her long poem, ‘A Drama of Exile’ (*Religious Education*, p.49).



already prevail there.<sup>29</sup> As the ‘ancient Christian Church’ prized ‘woman’s separate responsibility for her actions,’ so the existent church must hold ‘a great career’ for women as believers who will aim ‘at evolution’ within the church rather than ‘repression’ (p.31). Hinting here at the powerful role of women in early Christianity, Littledale gives the female believer a central position within the future of the Christian church, encouraging her to be “‘strong-minded’” and assertive, rather than ‘weak-minded’ and passive (p.31). Society must, Littledale argued, free itself ‘of the error of bringing all girls up with the view that they are to try and get married’ and allow religion ‘to step in’ and ‘teach young women a nobler and more comprehensive theory of life’ (pp.43, 44). Littledale implicitly offers support for the conventual lifestyle here, as well as encouraging women to invest in God rather than a mortal husband.

Littledale concluded his pamphlet by constructing an eight-point plan, which, if followed by the female believer, served to help ‘overcome the present inertness’ of her ‘religious life’ and education (p.47). First, she must take responsibility for herself by becoming independent of family and all exterior sources of help; second, she must learn to use her study time wisely ‘to prevent waste of powers and opportunities for good’; third, she must concentrate all of her energies into ‘religious aim,’ completing ‘definitive work, instead of using it as an emotional safety valve to let off steam’; fourth, she must mindfully work through religious doctrine and creed and learn ‘not merely its statements, but the reasons for these statements’; fifth, she must contemplate justice and

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price *is* far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchant’s ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength and strengthened her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household *are* clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing *is* silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth *it*; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour *are* her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is* the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her’ (Proverbs 31. 10-28).

morality; sixth, she must strive 'after a higher spirituality'; seventh, she must avoid extremes in the expression of her faith, neither resorting to 'vehement assertion' or indifference; and eighth, she must combine 'the Divine and Human in every perfect work on earth,' assuming a status which allows one to be equally spiritual and rational (p.48). Faith and intellect, then, are reliant on each other, liberating the Victorian woman from the domestic and private sphere.<sup>30</sup>

Rossetti developed her role as defender of women's intellectual rights in her prose descriptions of Eve, whose fatal fall actually allowed humanity access to knowledge, albeit in a sinful manner. For Rossetti, I contend, Eve is dominated by her intellectualism, prey to misleading temptations because she thinks excessively about

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<sup>30</sup> Such a plan corresponds with many nineteenth-century religious instructive manuals for training preachers, Henry Forster Burden's popular edition of *Mental Discipline: or, Hints on the Cultivation of Intellectual and Moral Habits: Addressed Particularly to Students in Theology and Young Preachers* (1830), providing an appropriate example. Where Littledale commands women to become independent of exterior aid, Burden informs his readers to avail themselves 'of the assistance of others whether tutors, associates or authors,' in Henry Forster Burden, *Mental Discipline: or, Hints on the Cultivation of Intellectual and Moral Habits: Addressed Particularly to Students in Theology and Young Preachers*, Third Edition Considerably Enlarged to Which is Appended an Address on Pulpit Eloquence by the Rev. Justin Edwards D. D. Also A Course of Study in Christian Theology by the Rev. Leonard Woods D. D. (New York: Jonathan Leavitt; Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1830), p.33. As Littledale remarks upon a strict use of time, so Burden stresses to his ordinands that 'the arrangements for the distribution of your Time, be judiciously formed, and prosecuted with the utmost diligence and punctuality' (*Mental Discipline*, p.35). Women, states Littledale, must focus their energies entirely upon devotional practice, as Burden's student of theology must apply 'the mind with full Vigour and undivided Attention to every intellectual Pursuit' (*Mental Discipline*, p.30). A mindful investigation into doctrine and theology lies at the core of Littledale's manifesto, just as Burden emphasizes the importance of expressing 'the result of your Inquiries and Reflections in your own words,' both readerships expected to gain moral schooling from their research (*Mental Discipline*, p.42). Where Littledale warns of overcharging the mind with vehement thought, Burden advises his students to 'remember the influence of Devotional excitement on the operations of the intellect, when employed on spiritual subjects' (*Mental Discipline*, p.63). As Littledale places careful emphasis on obtaining only that knowledge for which one is prepared, Burden encourages his readers to be willing and 'desirous to have every Defect in [their] powers, attainments, and productions, fully and explicitly pointed out' and to recognize, like Littledale's women, that both the human and divine must balance one's constitution (*Mental Discipline*, p.33). While such parallels are striking, Burden's primer also offers several rules to its novice preachers that more subtly adhere to the social codes recognized as shaping the actions and mannerisms of Victorian middle-class women. Nearly all the thirty sections of *Mental Discipline's* Part II figure 'feminine' attributes, instructing the reader to aim at purity, appeal to the conscience and emotions, adopt an efficient method to convey 'Religious Instruction to the young,' refrain from jealousy, rivalry and thus competitiveness, curb one's 'pursuits of Literature and Science,' exercise private devotion, 'guard against levity' and always practice courtesy, sentiment, prudence, discretion, punctuality and determined morality (*Mental Discipline*, pp.88-183). Such attributes might dignify and elevate the young preacher, but when applied to the devotional woman, brand her passive and spiritually sentimental devoid of any intellectual competence. Littledale's pamphlet, in addressing this imbalance, drives its female readership into an intellectual appreciation of faith, neatly exemplified by Rossetti in her writing.

them rather than deferring her scholarly curiosity into faith. It was not her capacity for thought that is at fault, Rossetti contends, but rather where it was directed. Eve's only real mistake was that she craved knowledge without the aid of a scholarly framework, Rossetti argues, as dangerous an aim as one who attempts to use a hazardous piece of machinery without the proper training. Such a mistake is underplayed by Rossetti in her emphasis on Eve's deception by the snake, a trick Adam also fell prey to in an error of judgement that parallels Eve's actions (*LS*, p.17). Thus, both Eve and Adam can be found equally responsible for the fall, each taking a course that led to 'one common ruin,' and yet the motives behind their errors are significantly different (p.18). For while Eve is guilty only of 'disregarding the plain obvious meaning of words, and theorizing on her own responsibility as to physical and intellectual results,' Adam commits the more serious sin of preferring Eve to God, dominated by emotion rather than rational thinking (*FD*, p.310; *LS*, p.18). Eve's 'feminine boldness and direction of aim' allows her to 'instruct ignorance [and] rectify misapprehension,' guilty only of allowing herself to think independently of God and become governed by personal attempts at interpretation (*LS*, pp.17-18). Rossetti is clear that 'Interpretation may err and darken knowledge,' but only the kind which is ungrounded by scholarly knowledge: her own reading of Eve, for example, is hardly conventional, but, rooted within a thorough understanding of, and belief in, the Bible, remains free of conjecture (*FD*, p.549).

Rossetti develops the Adam and Eve story into a moral fable for women's intellectualism in sonnet 15 of 'Later Life' through a reference, I argue, to Wordsworth's poem, 'The Tables Turned,' which directly addresses the subject of scholarly knowledge. Recalling the warning that women must be wary of their educating role due to Eve's example, Rossetti reminds us that it was the snake, symbol of evil and deceit, that 'turned the tables' on the innocent first lady by aligning the natural taste of the apple with infinite (but falsely acquired) knowledge:

Let woman fear to teach and bear to learn,



Remembering the first woman's mistake.

Eve had for pupil the inquiring snake,

Whose doubts she answered on a great concern;

But he the tables so contrived to turn (ll.1-5).

Like Wordsworth's narrator, who implores his friend to 'quit your books' and let 'Nature be your Teacher,' the snake lures Eve into rejecting the hard labour of study for the natural flavour of the apple and its consequent knowledge, both dismissing the 'meddling intellect' as a murderous influence on the human imagination ('The Tables Turned,' ll.3, 16, 26). Rossetti sees through the snake's attempt to dissuade women from engagement with true knowledge by associating them with feminized Nature rather than masculinized intellectual endeavour. Indeed, the first line, commanding women to 'fear to teach and bear to learn,' reminds her readership that one must take care to study suitably spiritual subjects, and not accept the poor education on offer to them in the nineteenth century. Trained quickly to fulfil vocational teaching positions with low pay and little respect, educated women, with few exceptions, were denied intellectual futures in university environments. Rossetti, then, encourages her predominantly middle-class female readers to refuse a stunting pedagogic life for one of scholarly study, a message that accords with the intellectual 'journey of faith' mapped through 'Later Life's' sonnet sequence.<sup>31</sup> As the educationalist Winifred Mercier warned in 1908: 'If education is not a religious thing – a spiritual thing – it should be cast out upon the dung-hill, for it will corrupt the world.'<sup>32</sup>

Intellectual faith, then, is the highest form of praise the believer can extend, offered always through prayer which works as a sort of antitoxin for wayward thoughts, concentrating the believer's focus on God. Guided by prayer, the believer may penetrate all mysteries, armed with a methodology combining love of God, religious faith and

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<sup>31</sup> Diane D'Amico, 'Christina Rossetti's *Later Life*: The Neglected Sonnet Sequence,' *Victorians Institute Journal*, 9 (1980-81), 21-28 (p.21).

intellectual insight (*SF*, p.324). She is thus able to address those religious quandaries that ‘tax a higher faculty in whoso would apprehend them [ . . . ] inappreciable except by faith and love,’ remaining reliant on scholarly endeavour, and so corresponding to Tractarian lines of religious inquiry (*SF*, p.292). For Rossetti, education demarcated the virtuous, her definition of God’s chosen nation comprising only those prepared to learn and study as she herself did. Ritualism not only set the scene for such inquiry, but enacted a set of ground rules to guide the believer’s own intellectual pursuits into the nature of her faith. Rossetti’s analysis of ritualism addresses three themes, the crucifixion, sainthood and prayers for the dead, I suggest, each serving to outline ritualism and teach the believer how to understand her faith in relation to intellectual endeavour. Before I explore her ritualist poetics, however, I wish to establish ritualism’s role within the Oxford Movement; and then demonstrate how Rossetti came into contact with such High Church ceremony.

## II Ritualism

Ritualist ceremony was popular by the time Rossetti was a young woman, and its presence was apparent in churches nation-wide, including the poet’s place of worship, Christ Church, Albany Street, a leading parish in the Oxford Movement. Developed from, rather than within the Oxford Movement, medieval ritual ceremony had already been implemented in some Tractarian churches like Christ Church, and now became commonplace within many High Church of England places of worship. Benjamin Jowett expressed his surprise at the extent of ritualism in London in a letter to a friend of 1865, declaring: ‘If you walked abroad you would be greatly astonished at the change which has come over the churches of London; there is a sort of aesthetico-Catholic revival

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<sup>32</sup> Winifred Mercier, unpublished letter in Lynda Grier, *The Life of Winifred Mercier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), in Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.175.

going on.’<sup>33</sup> In its nineteenth-century usage, the term ritualism meant the practices of those who introduced medieval or Laudian ceremonial into the Church of England. Its significance reached further than this, however, coming to register a rather ominous Gothic liturgy which critics distorted to the full, branding Oxford Movement ritualism a portentous and dangerous force in society. Ritualism was evinced in churches by the use of altar lights, candles and veils, the kneeling of the congregation at the consecration, the elevation of the Eucharist, prayers for the dead, the burning of incense and the mixing of water and wine in the chalice. Alexander Mackonochie, rector of St Albans, Holborn, was prosecuted by the Church Association for implementing such practices, and it was at his church that the Three Hours devotion of Good Friday was introduced, a clear signal of Roman Catholicism.<sup>34</sup> The sung service, the procession of the clergy and choir from the vestry, the assumption of the Eastward position when celebrating the Eucharist, the adoption of seasonal coloured coverings for an altar adorned by a back-lit cross, the ritual attending the reading of the Gospel and so on, could all be found at Christ Church.<sup>35</sup>

The extent of the ritual in buildings like Christ Church and St Albans was deemed offensive and Popish by those opposed to ritualism, notably the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury who attended St Albans in 1866. He recorded in his diary: ‘Such a scene of theatrical gymnastics, of singing, screaming, genuflections, such a series of strange movements of the priests, their backs almost always to the people, as I never saw before even in a Romish Temple.’<sup>36</sup> The church, Shaftesbury complained, was littered with iconic pictures and crosses, the atmosphere choked with: ‘Clouds upon clouds of incense, the censer frequently refreshed by the High Priest, who kissed the spoon, as he

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<sup>33</sup> In Paul Thureau-Dangin, *The English Catholic Revival in the Nineteenth-Century*, 2 vols (New York: E. P Dutton and Co., n.d.), in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, pp.60-61.

<sup>34</sup> James Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp.37, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, p.128.

<sup>36</sup> In Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, K. G. (London: Cassell, 1886), in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.61; see also Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, p.129.



dug out the sacred powder, and swung it about at the end of a silver chain.’<sup>37</sup> The event is described as a ‘melodrama,’ communion delivered ‘to the tune of soft music’ and the servitors dressed in ‘Romish apparel,’ everything absorbed by a secretive feel intimidated by a ‘tall iron grille’ hiding the high altar, a chancel screen which had a particular relevance for Rossetti as I will suggest in chapter five.<sup>38</sup> This kind of adornment formed the basis of Tractarian worship for many believers, and Littledale argued that unless these ornamental practices had been outlawed by either Henry VIII in 1545 or Edward VI in 1547, they were acceptable. Ritualism could not be abolished, Littledale wrote, if it did not contradict ‘some express statement of the Prayer Book. Thus, censers were used in 1548, and therefore incense is lawful now, though it is not mentioned in the Prayer Book.’<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Littledale asserted that ‘the most illustrious names of the Anglican Communion,’ men such as Laud, Ken and Wilson, had welcomed ‘the doctrines of Baptismal Regeneration, Apostolical Succession, the Priesthood, the Real Presence, the Eucharistic Sacrifice, Prayer for the Dead, and Auricular Confession.’<sup>40</sup> This call to tradition was a popular device for Tractarians, as I have suggested, and caused many High Churchmen to tolerate ritualism even in its most medieval form.

Where ritualism was attacked, however, it was often through the figure of Pusey, found guilty of ritualist practice by Walter Walsh in his notorious *Secret History of the Oxford Movement* (1898). Walsh accused Pusey, with some grounds, of wearing hair shirts, entering into severe fasting schemes, acting as a secret agent for Rome and encouraging numerous secret religious societies.<sup>41</sup> Anyone thought to be indulging in such behaviour was labelled a Puseyite as a result of their namesake’s manifest Catholic leanings, although it is conspicuous that Pusey never joined the Roman Catholic Church as did Newman, William Dodsworth, rector of Christ Church, and Henry Manning.

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, p.61.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, p.61.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Frederick Littledale, *Catholic Ritual in the Church of England Scriptural, Reasonable, Lawful* (1865), in Nockles, *Oxford Movement*, p.216.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Frederick Littledale, ‘The First Report of the Ritual Commission’ (1868), in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.112.

<sup>41</sup> Walsh, *Secret History* (1898), p.36ff.

Pusey was condemned by publications such as *Punch*, figured as a moth drawn to a Roman Catholic candle in one issue.<sup>42</sup> He was also attacked within popular fiction like *Barchester Towers* (1857), wherein Mr. Slope expresses a furious hostility towards Pusey's followers. Slope 'trembles in agony at the iniquities of the Puseyites,' with their satanic 'black silk waistcoats' and prayer-books, 'printed with red letters, and ornamented with a cross on the back.'<sup>43</sup> William Conybeare echoed this concern in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1853, naming 'the clipped shirt-collar, the stiff and tie-less neckcloth, the M. B. coat (for 'Mark of the Beast') and cassock waistcoat, the cropped hair and unwhiskered cheek' as the Puseyite uniform, giving the wearer an ascetic and forbidding mien.<sup>44</sup> Many Tractarian clergy encouraged such criticism by enhancing their cassocks with cotta and biretta to give themselves the appearance of Catholic priests. Pusey denounced involvement with ritualism at first, however, and stated that he had 'a thorough mistrust of the Ultra Ritualist body,' fearing that 'the Ritualists and the old Tractarians differ both in principle and in object.'<sup>45</sup> An extreme ascetic, Pusey was attracted to the discipline ritual imposed in church, however, and permanently wore a hair shirt, refused to smile (except at children) and undertook severe self-imposed flagellation and fasting routines.<sup>46</sup>

Pusey was especially captivated by the practice of auricular confession and began to hear confessions as early as 1838, forever concerned to enable the penitent to become cleansed and regenerated by disclosing her sins.<sup>47</sup> The sacrament of confession was officially terminated at the establishment of the Anglican Church under Elizabeth I and Pusey claimed that this outlawing of confession had all but caused the Church of England's current state of spiritual despondency. Commentators such as Bishop Henry

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<sup>42</sup> 'The Puseyite Moth and Roman Candle,' *Punch* (1850), in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.xiii.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers* [1857], ed. John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.28.

<sup>44</sup> William John Conybeare, 'Church Parties,' *The Edinburgh Review*, 98 (1853), 273-342, in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.80.

<sup>45</sup> In Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline, *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline* (London: H. M. S. O., 1906), in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.19.

<sup>46</sup> Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, p.86; Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.20.

Phillpotts claimed that confession should be ‘merely recommended to those sinners whose troubled conscience admits not of being quieted by self-examination,’ whereas Pusey was convinced of its centrality in the Church of England.<sup>48</sup> In *The Entire Absolution of the Penitent*, preached in 1846, Pusey declared that confession must be regularly and systematically instituted in the Church of England, and maintained that this view was endorsed by some of the Reformers and Caroline Divines.<sup>49</sup> Yet confession came to be viewed as a kind of secret privilege for Tractarians to indulge in Roman practice. E. A. Knox described it as ‘a rite stigmatized as papistical’ and so ‘all the more alluring,’ the ‘thrill of mystery and of persecution for the faith’ adding ‘to the joy of unburdening the conscience.’<sup>50</sup> Walsh affirmed this by reciting the story of Miss Cusack, also known as the Nun of Kenmare, who, after receiving confession from Pusey, wrote: ‘I believe that *the secrecy, and concealment*, and devices which had to be used to get an audience with the Doctor, for the purpose of Confessing had a little, if it had not a good deal, to do with his success.’<sup>51</sup> The reestablishment of confession, then, provoked much anti-Catholic anxiety, voiced by Charles James Blomfield, Bishop of London, in his declaration that confession was ‘the source of unspeakable abominations.’<sup>52</sup> Such horrors were thought to have the potential to damage two dominant nineteenth-century institutions: first, the Church of England, threatened by the spread of Catholic mannerisms; and secondly, the Victorian family unit, which would be intruded into by the questioning priest.<sup>53</sup> Confessing one’s sins to God through the medium of a human agent in the space of a confessional box threatened Victorian sensibility because it forced one to broadcast sin outside of the family to a priest portrayed as perversely eager to listen.

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<sup>47</sup> Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.47.

<sup>48</sup> Bishop Henry Phillpotts, *Letters to Charles Butler* (London, 1825), in Nockles, *Oxford Movement*, p.249.

<sup>49</sup> E. B. Pusey, *The Entire Absolution of the Penitent* (1846), in Nockles, *Oxford Movement*, pp.249-250.

<sup>50</sup> E. A. Knox, *The Tractarian Movement: 1833-1845* (London: Putnam, 1934), in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.49.

<sup>51</sup> N. F. Cusack, *The Story of my Life* (1891), in Walsh, *Secret History* (1898), p.87.

<sup>52</sup> C. J. Blomfield, *A Charge to the Clergy of London* [1842], in Bentley, *Ritualism*, p.30.

<sup>53</sup> Bentley, *Ritualism*, pp.30-31.



Thus Rome was seen as entering the domestic space, and women were deemed most at risk, as Charles Maurice Davies alleged in *Philip Pasternoster* (1858): 'It would be a fatal day for England if ever England's wives and daughters were led to deem the confessional a more sacred place than the home.'<sup>54</sup> The notion of male confessors cajoling female penitents to confess their sins and sexual secrets induced far-fetched anti-Catholic propaganda, betraying a fear that the priest might usurp the control husbands and fathers held over their wives and daughters. This paranoia was largely stirred by anecdotes, such as the one Sir William Harcourt narrated in a letter to *The Times*, in which he quoted the Catholic confessor of the King of Spain bragging to his penitent: 'I hold your God in my hand, and I have your wife at my feet.'<sup>55</sup> As Miss Cusack attests in recounting her liaisons with Pusey, 'few men went to Confession' with the 'Doctor,' and Walsh's chapter, 'Ritualistic Sisterhoods,' implicates Pusey as an insidious meddler intent on diffusing Catholicism through Britain by way of kidnapping women for his conventual establishments.<sup>56</sup>

Such scandal connected Tractarianism to the Gothic, macabre, grotesque and supernatural, subverting sexual and gender norms as well as religious ones. Newman even confessed that one of his early experiences of Roman Catholicism was mediated through the novels of Ann Radcliffe.<sup>57</sup> As Emma Clery suggests of Radcliffe's novel, *The Italian or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797), 'the confessional

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<sup>54</sup> Charles Maurice Davies, *Philip Pasternoster* (1858), in Susan David Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects: Revelations of Gender and Power in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p.47.

<sup>55</sup> William Harcourt, letter to *The Times*, 30 July 1874, in Bentley, *Ritualism*, p.34; an excessive measure of 'No Popery' literature was issued in the nineteenth century and certain volumes republished from the eighteenth, to warn women of the lascivious ways of priests. I do not have space in this chapter to discuss nineteenth-century anti-Catholicism in as much detail as it warrants, but see E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), for a good overview of the subject. Anthony Gavin's *The Great Red Dragon; or the Master-Key to Popery* (1773) presented collected accounts of prurient priests who, as Susan Bernstein notes, had used 'vows of celibacy as a disguise for their ferocious sexual power' exercised 'repeatedly in the confessional box,' in Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects*, p.52. An ex-Catholic priest, Gavin recalls young women who have confessed to committing 'all sorts of lewdness, only with ecclesiastical persons' and writes of a priest who boasts that he 'spared no woman of any parish, whom [he] had a fancy for,' in Anthony Gavin, *The Great Red Dragon; or the Master-Key to Popery* (1773), in Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects*, p.52.

<sup>56</sup> Walsh, *Secret History* (1898), pp.87, 164.

<sup>57</sup> Newman, *Apologia*, p.24.

privileged in Radcliffe's title was intrinsically sinister,' alerting her readership that they would have to be 'prepared to encounter the dark influence of the Catholic priesthood.'<sup>58</sup> Walsh's sensational presentation of Pusey indeed painted him as if he were Father Schedoni at times, fashioning Pusey as a macabre advocate of confession and sisterhoods. The preacher was concerned to restore religious orders within the Church of England, although not, perhaps, of the kind Walsh envisioned, and wished his daughter, Lucy, with whom Lizzie Siddal was acquainted through Ruskin, to attend the religious life.<sup>59</sup> When Lucy died of tuberculosis when just fifteen, Pusey decided to meet with William Dodsworth on the day of her funeral in 1844 to debate proposals for the first Anglican sisterhood which was finally instituted in Park Village West, close to where Rossetti lived. The year previous to that of Lucy's death saw Rossetti's initiation at Christ Church, Albany Street, and Pusey is recorded as being particularly impressed with the 'exceptional zeal of some members of the congregation.'<sup>60</sup>

The parishioners were in turn stirred by Pusey, as Sara Coleridge, a regular churchgoer of Christ Church, observed: 'He is certainly, to my feelings, more impressive than anyone else in the pulpit, though he has not one of the graces of oratory. His discourse is generally a rhapsody, describing with infinite repetition and accumulateness [sic], the wickedness of sin, the worthlessness of earth, and the blessedness of heaven. He is still as a statue all the time he is uttering it, looks as white as a sheet, and is monotonous as possible in delivery. While listening to him, you do not seem to see and hear a *preacher*, but to have visible before you a most earnest and devout spirit, striving to carry out in this world a high religious theory.'<sup>61</sup> As Marsh notes, if the matured Mrs Coleridge was affected as deeply as these comments bear out, the young and sensitive Rossetti may have been bewildered by Pusey's fervour, and

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<sup>58</sup> Emma Clery, 'Introduction,' in Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian or the Confessional of the Black Penitents: A Romance*, ed. Frederick Garber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.vii-xxxi (p.xiii); see also Clery's *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>59</sup> Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.170.

<sup>60</sup> In Henry William Burrows, *A Short History of Christ Church Albany Street* (1887), in Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.58.

<sup>61</sup> Sara Coleridge, *Life and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, 2 vols (1873), in Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.57.

even a little frightened.<sup>62</sup> Coleridge's observations are astute, noting Pusey's obsession with sin, worthiness, heaven and religious theory, the latter indicative of Pusey's profound intellect. Another onlooker, G. W. E. Russell, declared that Pusey's sermons 'were packed with learning, and exhaustive of the subjects with which they dealt,' revealing an intensely educated speaker.<sup>63</sup> After taking a double first at Oriel, Pusey mastered Arabic, Syriac and some German, was appointed to the Oxford Chair of Hebrew in 1829 and thus assumed his predecessor's duty of cataloguing all the Arabic manuscripts in the Bodleian Library.<sup>64</sup> Pusey wrote seven of the *Tracts for the Times*, the first, on fasting, indicating his early interest in self-denial; and other main concerns including the Eucharist, Baptism and the incarnation, each emphasizing a physical reality of the spirit. Like Rossetti, Williams and Newman, Pusey insisted that God may only be perceived indirectly in order to respect his mystery, and yet believed religious scholarship should be accessible, a conviction conveyed through his translation of the works of the Church Fathers for the general reader.<sup>65</sup> The Fathers were valued by Pusey as exemplary of fusing doctrine and devotion, and this merging of faith and conscious religious knowledge can be found in both Pusey's work and Rossetti's poetry.

Pusey's and Rossetti's sense of their unworthiness before God also couples them: Rossetti continually adopting the 'lowest place' before God; and Pusey believing his sin the cause of the death of his wife in 1839, and of Lucy in 1844. Obsessed with confession as a path to regeneration, Pusey confessed to Keble in the year his daughter died. Pusey emphasized his sense of utter inferiority to Keble, presenting himself as an ascetic believer:

My dear wife's illness first brought to me, what has since been deepened by the review of my past life, how, amid special mercies and guardianship of God, I am scarred all over and seamed with sin, so that I am a monster to myself; I

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<sup>62</sup> Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.57.

<sup>63</sup> G. W. E. Russell, *The Household of Faith* (1903), in Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, p.72.

<sup>64</sup> Pusey's predecessor to the Hebrew Chair was Alexander Nicoll, see Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, p.74.



loathe myself; I can feel of myself only like one covered with leprosy from head to foot; guarded as I have been, there is no one with whom I do not compare myself, and find myself worse than they.<sup>66</sup>

There is a noticeable similarity in tone between Pusey's sorrowful disclosure and the contents of a letter written by Rossetti to a dying Dante Gabriel, concerned with the past actions of his life. She writes: 'I want to assure you that, however harassed by memory or anxiety you may be, I have (more or less) heretofore gone through the same ordeal. I have borne myself till I became unbearable to myself, and then I have found help in confession and absolution and spiritual counsel, and relief inexpressible.'<sup>67</sup> Further, as Marsh recognizes, Rossetti's short story, *Maude*, expresses a similar sensation of unworthiness as the narrative follows the spiritual breakdown of a fifteen-year-old girl whose demise is signalled by her refusal to take communion on account of her sins.<sup>68</sup> Rossetti intimates in the poem, 'After Communion' (*P*, 1875), that to receive the body and blood of Christ is a process which moulds the soul into a waiting room for Christ's 'flame' to reside, until it explodes within heaven (ll.7-8). The believer's personal relationship with Christ is tightened here: his role as Lord becoming God, Friend now Lover and King Spouse, a bond underlined by the 'banner' of 'love' which frames their union, a clear reference to the Song of Solomon (ll.1-5). Alarmed, then, by the prospect of such an intense alliance with God, the spiritually disturbed Maude refuses to receive communion. She declares: 'I will not profane Holy Things; I will not add this to all the rest. I have gone over and over again, thinking I should come right in time, and I do not come right [ . . . ] Some day I may be fit again to approach the Holy Altar, but till then I

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<sup>65</sup> *The Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church*, 48 vols, see Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, pp.78-79.

<sup>66</sup> In Henry Parry Liddon, *Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, ed. Rev. J. O. Johnston and the Rev. R. J. Wilson, 4 vols (London: Longmans and Co., 1893-1897), in Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, p.80.

<sup>67</sup> Christina Rossetti, letter to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 2 December 1881, in Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.60.

<sup>68</sup> Christina Rossetti, *Maude* (1849-50), in *Poems and Prose*, ed. Jan Marsh (London: Everyman, 1994), pp.251-274; further references to this edition are given in the text, and where necessary, signified by the title *Maude*. It is of note that Rossetti wrote a sequel to *Maude* entitled *Corrispondenza Famigliare*

will at least refrain from dishonouring it' (*Maude*, p.267). Maude finally breaks down, 'leaning upon the table and weeping bitterly' in remorse (p.267).

*Maude*, while not directly autobiographical, remains reflective of Rossetti's own childhood, in particular her 1845 'breakdown' noted by nearly all of her biographers as transforming Rossetti from a whimsical and impetuous little girl, to a controlled, introspective and apprehensive young woman. At fifteen, Rossetti suffered an illness manifesting symptoms of dark depression, weight-loss, great fatigue and violent outbursts, including an occasion on which Rossetti tore open her arm with a pair of scissors. After she had seen many different physicians who failed to diagnose her, the distinguished Dr. Charles Hare was consulted, observing that between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, Rossetti was 'more or less out of her mind (suffering, in fact, from a form of insanity, I believe a kind of religious mania).'<sup>69</sup> Her poetry of this time, morbid, morose and melancholy, attests more to a writer aware of Victorian poetic style than one in the throes of nervous breakdown and while its themes are less obviously religious, it remains obsessed with God and faith.<sup>70</sup> Rossetti's biographers, however, seem cautious in attributing religious mania to her, Kathleen Jones declaring that her illness was unlikely to have been caused by 'excessive religious zeal,' attributing it to Rossetti's prudent escape from 'domestic and social duties.'<sup>71</sup> Lona Mosk Packer's notoriously ungrounded assertion that Rossetti engaged in a tragic love-affair sidelines her religious breakdown, and Marsh's inference that her father forced her into 'some

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(*Family Correspondence*), an unfinished epistolary novel written in Italian and first published in *The Bouquet* (1852).

<sup>69</sup> James A. Kohl traces Hare's note to the blank pages of Godfrey Bilchett's copy of MacKenzie Bell's *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study* (1898), in 'A Medical Comment on Christina Rossetti,' *Notes and Queries*, 15:213:11 (1968), 423-424 (p.423); see also Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.52-53.

<sup>70</sup> Undoubtedly Rossetti was physically ill at this time, and her family history displayed distinct cases of mental illness, most notably her uncle John Polidori, author of *The Vampyre* (1819) and physician to Byron, who committed suicide in 1821. Rossetti's failing health, however, should not be overstated. Frances Thomas reminds us of the young poet's cheery letters to her brothers at this time, in *Christina Rossetti*, p.53; and Kathleen Jones remarks upon Rossetti's supposed hysteria as a convenient escape from the world, reminding us of Dora Greenwell's comment that ill health established a 'little cave to run into' which had 'many social immunities' for Rossetti, in Kathleen Jones, *Learning Not to be First: The Life of Christina Rossetti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.20-21.

<sup>71</sup> Jones, *Learning*, pp.18, 21.

sexual activity at the age of twelve or thirteen' merely gestures that this may have made her 'vulnerable to the teaching of Pusey and Dodsworth.'<sup>72</sup>

Rossetti's adolescent breakdown was, I think, caused by her obsessively devout Tractarian faith which caused her to feel extreme emotions of guilt and unworthiness she was unable to intellectualize until her later life. It is my argument that Dr. Hare's assessment was correct in attributing religious mania to her, an explanation reliant on recognizing the poet as a fervent Tractarian. Her faith consumed the juvenile poet as it did many young middle-class women in the nineteenth century. One recalls Florence Nightingale's religious breakdown at seventeen and the fictional Lucy Snowe's disturbing fixation on Catholicism in *Villette*, driven to 'the church and confessional' because of a 'cruel sense of desolation' that 'pained [her] mind.'<sup>73</sup> Pusey had defended the practice of confession to Manning precisely because of its healing effects upon a fourteen-year-old girl whose spiritual depression was lifted by the magical outcome of her penitential revelations.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Rossetti's tortured and manic state subsided, and Marsh contends that by moving away from Pusey's direction, 'she endeavoured to create and share with others a contemplative understanding of the divine order.'<sup>75</sup> Rossetti continued to assume the 'lowest place' psychologically, intensifying her stringent faith, and yet seems to have developed happy relationships with both friends and family, undermining the conception of Rossetti as a desolate and lonely soul.<sup>76</sup> Both Janet Camp Troxell and Antony Harrison have recognized a satirical, confident and witty writer in Rossetti's letters: Troxell pointing out her 'vivid humour,' and Harrison noting

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<sup>72</sup> L. M. Packer, *Christina Rossetti* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.260.

<sup>73</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* [1853] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.231; also quoted in Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects*, p.58.

<sup>74</sup> In Keith Denison, 'Dr Pusey as Confessor and Spiritual Counsellor,' *Pusey Rediscovered*, ed. Perry Butler (London: SPCK, 1983), in Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.63.

<sup>75</sup> Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.452.

<sup>76</sup> When Rossetti's niece, Helen Rossetti, burst into a sudden temper, Rossetti claims to have been reminded of herself as a child, and there is no suggestion that William's daughter was an abused and agonised melancholic. Rossetti told Helen: 'You must not imagine that your Aunt was always the calm and sedate person you now behold. I, too, had a very passionate temper [and] on one occasion, being rebuked by my dear Mother for some fault, I seized upon a pair of scissors, and ripped up my arm to vent



her will to self-promotion balancing her usual avowal of unworthiness.<sup>77</sup> Rossetti suffered while she remained a Puseyite, but partly because she had chosen to fashion herself that way, and attendance at Christ Church, Albany Street, would have required her to assume a sombre High Church demeanour. At the same time, it is clear that she was gratified through her position within a Tractarian establishment, accentuating sin and contrition like Pusey did, while aesthetically appreciative of the medieval adornment so apparent in Christ Church.

Christ Church was blatantly Catholic in its ritual, its liturgy close to that outlined in the missal and paralleling that Mackonochie was prosecuted for implementing at St Albans. In a manuscript drawn up for the private use of Mr Delane, the Editor of *The Times*, entitled *The Principal Clergy of London* (1844), the resident priest at Christ Church, Dodsworth, is listed as a 'Decided Tractarian,' on a scale classifying clergymen according to their opinions on church questions of the day.<sup>78</sup> The document lists 'Christ Church, Albany Street, Regents Park' as a ritualistic place, 'illuminated with the Back Light: [and] everything arranged to produce "effect,"' describing the service as 'antiphonal' as in many Catholic churches (p.6). The reader is then informed that she should turn to the entry for 'St Paul, Knightsbridge,' presided over by W. J. E. Bennett,

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my wrath,' in Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.50; atrocious behaviour indeed, but a not unheard of eruption in the life of a sensitive girl.

<sup>77</sup> Janet Camp Troxell, *Three Rossettis: Unpublished Letters from Dante Gabriel, Christina and William* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1937), p.148; Antony H. Harrison, 'Epistolary Relations: The Correspondence of Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti,' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 4 (1995), 91-101 (p.95); see also *The Letters of Christina Rossetti*, ed. Antony H. Harrison, 4 vols (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1997-).

<sup>78</sup> 'The Principal Clergy of London: Classified According to their opinions on the Great Church questions of the day' 1844, Bodleian Library, MS Add c.290; the classification scale is written at the beginning of the manuscript and appears as follows: As near Roman as possible – Decided Tractarians – All Strong Tractarians – Strong Tractarians – Tractarians – A leaning toward the Tractarian party – Supposed leaning toward the Tractarian party – Moderates openly attached to neither party but supposed to incline rather towards the *High* than the *Low* Church – [ . . . ] Moderates: - all of the old 'High and Dry' School – Moderates: - Supposed to be rather inclined to *High* Church – Moderates: - supposed to be inclined to *Low* Church – Moderates: - inclined to the Evangelical party – Evangelical moderates – Evangelical moderates but a stage in advance of the last four – Evangelicals – Strong Evangelicals – Very Decided Evangelicals – Very Low Church 'After the Tractarian Heresy' – Decidedly Low Church [ . . . ] – extremely low Church prepared to take any step against Tractarianism – On the verge of Dissent, pp.3-4; further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

for further information on Christ Church, its service ‘performed similarly to that at Mr Bennett’s’ (p.6):

The service in this church approaches [ . . . ] v. nearly to that of a R. C. Cathedral [ . . . ] All the responses are chanted – the litany by the intendent himself: - there are boy choristers in white gowns to assist: - the Altar is as nearly a ‘High Altar’ as possible [ . . . ] [and] there are constant genuflexions [sic] + bowings toward it. The sermon is of course preached in a surplice (p.7).

Rossetti may have met Bennett at Frome, a small country town by Longleat House where Aunt Charlotte was Governess to Lady Bath who employed Bennett when he was forced out of his cure at St Barnabas, Pimlico, due to his ritualistic practices there. His instalment at Frome was at first controversial, and locals assumed he was a Catholic as they did the Rossettis, their Italian name signifying a loyalty to the Pope. Marsh also notes that Bennett was connected to the Rossettis through Frances who was asked to Frome ‘under his aegis,’ and whether this is true or not, the female, and High Church side of the Rossetti family, did not seem particularly worried about their assumed association with Catholicism.<sup>79</sup> At Christ Church, the Rossettis would have heard the almost Catholic preaching of Pusey and Manning, as well as that of their own Tractarian rector, Dodsworth, whose Advent sermons of 1848 echo through Rossetti’s own Advent poems.<sup>80</sup> As John Waller argues, it was unusual for Tractarians to be concerned with

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<sup>79</sup> Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, pp.108, 144.

<sup>80</sup> On this connection see John O. Waller, ‘Christ’s Second Coming: Christina Rossetti and the Premillennialist William Dodsworth,’ *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 73 (1969), 465-82; he notes that Advent is a familiar theme in Rossetti’s poetry and refers the reader to ‘The End of Time,’ ‘The Time of Waiting,’ ‘Death is Swallowed up in Victory,’ ‘Have Patience,’ ‘For Advent,’ ‘Advent: “Come,” thou dost say,’ ‘Eye Hath Not Seen,’ ‘The Heart Knoweth its Own Bitterness,’ ‘To What Purpose is this Waste?’ ‘A Harvest,’ ‘Ye Have Forgotten the Exhortation,’ ‘The Lowest Room,’ ‘After This the Judgement,’ ‘Advent: This Advent moon,’ ‘Earth has clear call of daily bells,’ ‘From House to Home,’ ‘Watch with me, men, women and children dear,’ ‘Passing away, saith the World, passing away,’ ‘Sooner or later; yet at last,’ ‘Tread softly! all the earth is holy ground,’ ‘Until the Day Break,’ ‘Behold a Shaking,’ ‘The day is at hand,’ ‘When my heart is vexed I will complain,’ ‘Advent Sunday,’ ‘Advent: Earth grown old,’ ‘Ascension Day,’ ‘Roses on a brier,’ ‘Heaven’s chimes are slow, but sure to strike at last,’ ‘Marvel of

Advent and the Second Coming, generally nonconformist domains, and thus Dodsworth's 'combination of High Church activist and premillennialist preacher' would have been striking to Rossetti.<sup>81</sup>

While I acknowledge Dodsworth's influence over Rossetti, I would like to focus on Pusey here as one who had fundamental significance in the way in which she fashioned herself as a Tractarian. Dodsworth would have been out of favour with the Rossettis from 1851 anyway when he converted to Roman Catholicism, leaving Christ Church in a state of considerable confusion. Marsh claims that the Polidori and Rossetti women's categorical Anglican allegiance would have prevented Rossetti from following Dodsworth, but as a Christian so entirely invested in how and why she should believe, I think Rossetti would have gone over to Rome if she had wanted to.<sup>82</sup> She had no qualms refusing Emily Davies support for her women's college at Cambridge on the grounds that while she had nothing against the idea, she could not join 'anything that did not belong to the Catholic Church.'<sup>83</sup> Rossetti was attracted to the Roman elements of Tractarianism, but remained High Church like Pusey and Williams.<sup>84</sup> Marsh seems troubled by Pusey's influence over Rossetti, questioning why she had acquired from him

marvels, if I myself shall behold,' 'Sunday Before Advent,' 'Awake thou that sleepest,' 'O knell of a passing time,' 'Time passeth away with its pleasure and pain' and 'For All,' pp.465-466fn3.

<sup>81</sup> Waller, 'Christ's Second Coming,' p.466; *The Face of the Deep* also testifies to Rossetti's interest in the Apocalypse and her own copy of Keble's *The Christian Year* [1827] reveals that she highlighted two of the four Advent Sundays with 'small plus-like crosses' to further endorse her fascination with this season that so preoccupied Dodsworth, see Diane D'Amico, 'Christina Rossetti's *Christian Year*: Comfort for "the weary heart,"' *The Victorian Newsletter*, Fall (1987), 36-42 (p.36).

<sup>82</sup> Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.120.

<sup>83</sup> Emily Davies, letter to Anna Richardson, 28 December 1867, in Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.365; as I noted in chapter one, Rossetti's refusal to sign Davies' petition is sometimes thought to indicate Rossetti's anti-feminist stance on women's education. It is important to recognize, however, that Rossetti herself attended University College, London, enrolling on a course of lectures discussing Dante's *Inferno* in 1878. London colleges were attended by a considerably higher percentage of women than either Oxford or Cambridge at this time and it is notable that while Davies eventually dropped her support of women's suffrage for fear of alienating financial backers for Girton, Rossetti's advocacy of religious education for women never faltered; Vicinus quotes the Women's Institute's compilation of the total number of women at each University in Britain in 1897, finding 275 at Cambridge, 162 at Oxford and an overwhelming 347 at London, in *Independent Women*, pp.127, 134.

<sup>84</sup> It is notable that Tractarians who began Christian life as Evangelicals, rather than those who had always been High Church, converted further into the Roman Catholic faith, see Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.180. When Dodsworth converted he became irritated with those who preached Catholicism within the Church of England and berated Pusey for attempting 'to satisfy persons out of the pale of the [Roman



‘an awful sense of unworthiness’ where Maria had developed a serene and happy state of mind in her devotion.<sup>85</sup> Yet as Marsh records, Maria was also touched by Pusey’s foreboding Christianity, teaching her Sunday Bible Class at Christ Church the import of studying sin, confession and penitence, and it is not unexpected that two sisters would develop similar Christian beliefs but express them in different ways.<sup>86</sup>

Both sisters, like their mother, were moved by Pusey’s commitment within the Christ Church parish, especially his work with the Park Village Sisterhood which finally commenced in 1845, the year of Rossetti’s ‘breakdown.’<sup>87</sup> It is possible that Rossetti’s self-fashioning as a Puseyite and consequent religious mania coincided, as she witnessed the mysterious Park Village Sisters in attendance at Christ Church with Pusey and Dodsworth. Dressed ‘in simple black habits, cloaks and bonnets,’ the Sisters’ clothes recalled the uniform of the Puseyite which Conybeare described in *The Edinburgh Review*. Rossetti too almost always wore black, most strikingly as a member of the St Mary Magdalene House of Charity, Highgate, where she undertook rescue work with fallen women as an associate of the order, wearing a habit described by Letitia Scott as ‘very simple, elegant even; black with hanging sleeves, a muslin cap with lace edging, quite becoming to her with the veil.’<sup>88</sup> Maude dresses in a similar style but in white, an important colour for Rossetti who seems unusually preoccupied with whiteness as a signifier for spiritual cleanliness in her poetry, paralleling the clean shaven and immaculately presented Puseyite clergyman. Maude refuses communion precisely because she feels impure, despite the pains she takes to remain clean. Her dress is

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Catholic] Church with devotions designed for her own children’; William Dodsworth, *Further Comments on Dr Pusey’s Renewed Explanation* (1851), in Nockles, *Oxford Movement*, p.227.

<sup>85</sup> Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p.64.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid*, p.241.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid*, p.58.

<sup>88</sup> Elaine Showalter, ed., *Christina Rossetti: Maude; Dinah Mulock Craik: On Sisterhoods, a Woman’s Thoughts about Women* (London: William Pickering, 1993), p.xiii; see also, Diane D’Amico, “‘Equal Before God’: Christina Rossetti and the Fallen Women of Highgate Penitentiary,” *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, ed. Antony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), pp.67-83.

emphatically 'white; simple, fresh and elegant,' and yet she is only ready for God in death, cloaked in funereal blackness (*Maude*, p.255).<sup>89</sup>

Rossetti's reaction to Pusey's black-clad Sisters may have been one of both surprise and attraction, allured by their devout status but unable to join them, haunted as she was by her own unworthiness before God. Rossetti was not really submissive enough for conventual life anyway, which would have suppressed the course of her intellectual development, but she remained captured by its allure in the same way as Maude, who intimates to Mary: 'You cannot imagine me either fit or inclined for such a life; still I can perceive that those who are so are very happy' (*Maude*, pp.261-262).<sup>90</sup> There is an inherent disappointment in Maude's answer, as if she is caught between the incompatible desires to assume the domestic status of the nun and to assert a public intellectual role. Tractarianism, however, welcomed intellectual and female believer alike into the laity, and served to challenge many Victorian patriarchal standards through its emphasis upon celibacy, separation of the sexes within church and relegation of the family to second place below the church.<sup>91</sup> Women outnumbered men by a noticeable majority in specifically Ritualist congregations, often unmarried and consciously choosing the religious life over that of marriage and domesticity, much to the dismay of male commentators. Reverend J. C. Chambers was not adverse to 'the scoffing censure that our churches are filled and our Altars crowded with women,' and one young curate despaired that Ritualism was a conspiring 'female movement,' wherein women could

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<sup>89</sup> Clothed in stark black or white, the believer is suitably presentable before God, although these two colours seem gendered for Rossetti and Maude's *bouts-rimés* sonnet announces: 'Some ladies dress in muslin full and white, | Some gentleman in cloth succinct and black [ . . . ] Witness a man with tassels on his back' (*M*, p.258, ll.1-2, 6). Maude's cousin Mary is confused by the sonnet's description, proclaiming, 'but surely men don't wear tassels' to which Maude replies: 'I have literally seen a man in Regent Street wearing a sort of hooded cloak with one tassel,' referring perhaps to the uniform of the Tractarian priest (*M*, p.258).

<sup>90</sup> Rossetti's rejection of conventual life was a conscious one, and she wrote to Caroline Gemmer that although she once 'went thro' a sort of romantic impression on the subject like many young people' she ultimately felt 'no drawing in that direction': 'It was my dear sister who had the pious, devotional, absorbed temperament: not I,' Christina Rossetti, undated letter to Caroline Gemmer, in Showalter, *Christina Rossetti*, pp.xiii-xiv.

<sup>91</sup> The object of such division was to 'afford protection to girls and young women who go to church alone,' as one *Church Times* reporter documented, 7 February 1873, in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.193-194.

usurp the places of clerics.<sup>92</sup> Littledale also remarked that ritualist worship was not generally popular 'outside the circle of clerics and their female adherents,' and the single men that did join this coterie were often inclined away from heterosexual family life, as both Shelton Reed and David Hilliard have observed.<sup>93</sup>

In accepting Christ as her husband and God as her father, the female believer radically isolated herself from the Victorian family in order to assume a position within the church which validated intellectual pursuits, independent work and aesthetic pleasures. Much of what signalled a ritualist church, its luxurious floral displays, embroidered kneelers and hangings and other such refined furnishings, was created by women, and Rossetti seems to have enjoyed the aesthetic ornamentation of her own parish. As she wrote to Caroline Gemmer in 1870: 'This Xmas at Christ Church we had a new and to me most delightful decoration, a large red cross reared on high in the Chancel arch; I hope it may reappear at Easter, though perhaps in different colours.'<sup>94</sup> Female believers were liberated, if only temporarily, from family obligations within the ritualist church to ponder and discuss their faith with other women and clergy, confessing troublesome thoughts and sins, not to a disapproving husband, but to a priest with the power of absolution. Faith, then, was an active, rather than passive choice for many women and thus approached intellectually rather than emotionally. For some believers, this active freedom was magnified by their entrance into sisterhoods and certainly Rossetti could not have moved freely among the slums of the city to aid and shelter working-class prostitutes without the protective armour of her veil.<sup>95</sup> Such cloistral refuge was attacked ostensibly because of its Popish overtones, although the concept of independent women, some in highly authoritative positions such as the role of the Mother Superior who became representative of Christ within the convent, was

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<sup>92</sup> John Charles Chambers, 'Private Confession and Absolution' (1867), in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.187.

<sup>93</sup> Richard Frederick Littledale, 'The Missionary Aspects of Ritualism,' (1866), in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.188; see also John Shelton Reed, "'Giddy Young Men": A Counter-Cultural Aspect of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism,' *Comparative Social Research*, 11 (1989), 209-226; and David Hilliard, 'UnEnglish and UnManly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality,' *Victorian Studies*, 25:2 (1982), 181-210.

<sup>94</sup> Christina Rossetti to Caroline Gemmer, 4 February 1870, Harrison, *Letters*, p.340.



equally threatening to Victorian society.<sup>96</sup> Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, for example, regarded the sisterhoods as no less a threat to the institution of marriage as to Protestantism, declaring that they enacted the ‘worst evils of Rome,’ indulging in ‘carnal perversions’ by claiming marriage to God and so undermining the ‘blessed and holy state of matrimony.’<sup>97</sup>

Margaret Goodman, an apparent victim of such sisterhoods, also argued that conventual isolation amounted to a ‘breach of the law of England,’ standing in ‘*direct opposition to the spirit of civil and religious liberty in this country*.’<sup>98</sup> While Goodman berated Rome for its damaging influence on British law, monarchy, liberty and implicitly, the status of women, Florence Nightingale argued that the Church of England

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<sup>95</sup> Showalter, *Christina Rossetti*, p.xiii.

<sup>96</sup> Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.68.

<sup>97</sup> Arthur Rawson Ashwell, *The Life of the Right Reverend Samuel Wilberforce With Selections from his Diary and Correspondence*, 3 vols (London: John Murray, 1880-1882), III, in Walsh, *Secret History* (1898), pp.180-182; such perversions were assumed inherent to abusive and sexually predatory Mother Superiors who tortured and imprisoned innocent middle-class girls in order to secure their inheritances and then leave them to falter. The relation of one such nun remarked that her sister had died because of the ‘cramped mental life and bodily austerities’ within the convent, although the religious life proved more comfortable than alternate roles such as governess, Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.62. Dodsworth even complained to Pusey that some women entered convents to escape the harshness of the world, only to be shocked at the life of ‘painful labour’ the nun was expected to undertake in the name of God, William Dodsworth, letter to Edward Bouverie Pusey, 9 September, 1845, in Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.65. Walsh, like many Protestants, blindly condemned sisterhoods based on journalistic conjecture such as that which accompanied the case of Miss Emily Ann Elizabeth Scobell, the daughter of an Evangelical clergyman, whose conventual experiences ended in misfortune. Scobell began a clandestine confessor-penitent relationship with John Mason Neale at a Tractarian Church in Brighton, and when discovered by her father, ran away to join the East Grinstead Sisterhood, where Littledale was chaplain, complaining that she was a victim of violent abuse at home, in Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p.199. A month after taking her vows at the Society of St. Margaret, the newly named Sister Amy contracted scarlet fever while attending the sick, and died appointing Neale and the Mother Superior as executors of her estate. When her father inherited nothing, he wrote an angry pamphlet entitled ‘Painful Account of the Perversion and Untimely Death of Miss Scobell, the Stolen Daughter of the Revd. J. Scobell, inveigled from her home, persuaded to become a Puseyite Sister of Mercy, and through threats of eternal damnation to her soul, plundered of her property by a crafty band of Puseyite Jesuits for the support of Popery: Also the Crimes in Convents Revealed by Father Gavazzi’ (n.d.) although as Shelton Reed points out, the Sisterhood claimed only £400 and Scobell’s brother received £6000, *Glorious Battle*, p.206. Neale and accompanying Sisters were attacked at Scobell’s funeral by a violent crowd screaming ‘No Popery’ and ‘Remember, remember the fifth of November,’ and when one of the mob was arrested for hitting Neale with stones, the judge simply acquitted him, condemning Neale of ‘injudicious’ behaviour. My articulation of this narrative is adapted from Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle*, pp.199-209; and Walsh, *Secret History* (1898), pp.170-173; see also Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.63, 312 fn.49; *St. Margaret’s Magazine*, 4 (1894), 109-25; Reverend J. Scobell, *The Rev. J. M. Neale and the Institute of St. Margaret’s, East Grinstead* (London: Nisbet, 1857); and J. M. Neale, *The Lewes Riot, Its Causes and Consequences* (London: 1857).

proved even more stifling of women's freedom. She wrote: 'The Church of England has for men bishoprics, archbishoprics, and a little work [ . . . ] She has for women – what? Most have no taste for theological discoveries. They would give their heads, their hearts, their hands.'<sup>99</sup> Rossetti, I argue, clearly did have a 'taste' for theological discovery, and Christ Church enabled her intellectual investigation into religious matters. With its display of ritual and Catholic mystery, Christ Church offered the poet a realm in which she could think about God in a manner transcendent of mere piety, with Dodsworth, Littledale and predominantly Pusey as her intellectual, as well as spiritual, guides.

### III A Ritual Poetics

Rossetti's concern to educate her reading public is revealed by her narrative position as a kind of tutor who intimately discusses and outlines ritualistic symbolism. Ritual becomes a central part of Rossetti's intellectual faith because it prepares the believer for engaging in her own thoughtful contemplation of God. Rossetti's poetry is lined with ritual imagery, both outwardly in its allusions to crucifixes, candles, incense and so on; and implicitly, using such symbolism to connote an intense adoration of Christ. Like Pusey, she is concerned to fuse her textual representation of doctrine with devotion, overwhelming her explanations of ritualism with an expression of her faith. Embraced by a mysterious ritual atmosphere, the reader of Rossetti's poetry, I think, is invited to enter a reflective state wherein she might think deeply about what she purports to believe. This is important to Rossetti, not only due to her conviction that thought was the basis of faith, but because without believers qualified to analyse and so defend religion, Christianity as a system would be unarmed against secular attack.

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<sup>98</sup> Margaret Goodman, *Sisterhoods in the Church of England* [1863], in Walsh, *Secret History* (1898), p.170 (emphasis in the text).

<sup>99</sup> Florence Nightingale, *Suggestions for Thought to the Searchers after Truth Among the Artizans of England*, 3 vols (London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1860), II, p.102, in Mary Poovey, ed., *Cassandra and other Selections from Suggestions for Thought* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1991), p.88.

Rossetti's use of ritual imagery, then, fulfils two aims. First, it establishes her as an intellectual, her use of ritual implying a background in theology which she presents within a poetic form to the uninitiated reader. Second, the ritual imagery inherent to Rossetti's poetry seduces the reader into a silent study space wherein she is liberated to think, recreating the church on the page and thus lulling the believer into a devout, but reflective, frame of mind. For the female believer in particular, isolated as she was from an institutional environment serving to concentrate her religious study, the ritual poem provided an imaginative space in which she could think. Rossetti's presentation of ritual focused the believer, then, on God and scripture, neutralizing worldly influence and privileging a contemplative relationship to one's faith.

Her presentation of ritual is communicated through the symbol of the crucifix and litanies of the saints and prayers for the dead. For Rossetti, the crucifix is an essential ritual symbol, elevated at the front of the church to remind the believer of Christ's agony in death. Such agony conveys to the believer that she too must suffer on earth as a Christian, but also intimates the anguish one must endure in understanding God's laws. To fully perceive the implications of scripture, the believer has to work hard, Rossetti suggests, struggling to ground her faith in knowledge and thus perfect herself as a Christian. Only the saints have achieved such flawlessness of faith, Rossetti contends, spiritual beings that mediate between the believer and God. The poet's second ritual theme, then, is the invocation of the saints, calling upon a state of holy purity towards which every believer must aspire. If, according to the Tractarians, the ideal faith is based on an intellectual apprehension of religious matters, the saints, as archetypal Christians, must also be exemplary intellectuals. Rossetti presents the saints thus, teachers of religious values and serving to prepare the believer for religious study, able to intercede for her with God and get her ready for entry to heaven. Even the purest believer, the Tractarians believed, remained wanting before God, even after death.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Tractarianism's reinstatement of prayers for the dead was particularly radical in light of the *Thirty-Nine Article's* article twenty-two, which ruled that once the believer was deceased, she simply waited for Judgement Day along with every other Christian: all the grave-yards were full and heaven totally empty.



The Movement thus reinstated prayers for the dead, the third notion Rossetti used to convey ritual, so that the deceased, anticipating judgement in purgatory, might be prayed for by the living. This created a great responsibility for the living believer, Rossetti implies, for only the true Christian, one whose faith is supported by religious education, may have any say with God in aiding the dead, hence emphasizing once again the significance of an intellectual faith.<sup>101</sup>

### (i) The Image of the Crucifix

For Rossetti, the image of the crucifix was a bloody and Gothic symbol of sacrifice, pain and Christ's savage murder, often illuminated in ritualist churches to imbue them with a spectral splendour. As she contended in *The Face of the Deep*: 'the Cross is the nucleus of heaven' (*FD*, p.504). Pusey was also insistent that the Cross signals that the world has been 'cleansed and sanctified,' finding its image 'impressed everywhere' from the 'courses of the heavenly bodies' to the 'human countenance,' from seaside stones to flowers and animals, 'on our doors, our windows, out streets, our roads, on dress, on furniture, on ornaments, on the soldier's sword and spear' and 'on the very mills which prepare our daily bread,' so 'that we may at all times think on it.'<sup>102</sup> Rossetti's poems on the crucifixion provoke the reader to always 'think on it' and observe its ritual overtones, as the narrator's response is shifted to the fore creating a relationship between Christ and the believer. This relationship is developed in Rossetti's poetry by the conflation of Christ's suffering on the cross with the anguish the believer feels on earth, struggling towards heaven amidst worldly temptation. Moreover, the pain Christ felt in death indicates to the believer the pain she must endure in her training as a Christian,

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The very concept of the saint, then, that is, one who now resides in heaven, is also clearly contradictory with article twenty-two, as no-one can reach heaven until Judgement Day.

<sup>101</sup> A fourth signifier of ritual, the chancel screen, is discussed in chapter five as a marker of reserve, tempting the believer to transgress its boundaries and reach the altar wherein God is symbolically located. To reach such a destination, Rossetti contends, the believer must attain a place in heaven by proving one's faith and religious wisdom.

<sup>102</sup> E. B. Pusey, *Parochial Sermons* (1878), III, in Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, pp.84-85.

God's message complex, emotive, coded and requiring great intellectual skill to understand. As a prominent symbol in Rossetti's poetry and the Tractarian church alike, the crucifix thus encouraged the believer to ponder on Christ's suffering and adopt a thinking relationship to him and that for which he stands.

Rossetti's narrators confront the crucifix, then, by identifying with Christ's suffering rather than glorifying in its brutality, quietly contemplating what he died for within the ritual study space of the poem. The narrator of 'Good Friday' (*PP*), for example, is frozen by the terror of what she perceives when confronted by the crucifix:

Am I a stone and not a sheep  
 That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy Cross  
 To number drop by drop Thy Blood's slow loss,  
 And yet not weep? (ll.1-4)

The image of Christ's steady loss of blood is sombre rather than shocking to the narrator, her stony disposition marking her off from the poem's depiction of those biblical mourners who collapse into depression. Mary Magdalene and Mary fall at the foot of the cross 'with exceeding grief,' Peter weeps 'bitterly,' and even the crucified thief is 'moved' (ll.1, 5-6, 7-10). Such sadness does not touch the narrator, however, and she marvels that 'I, only I' cannot grieve, asking God to redeem her obdurate heart and 'turn and look once more' at her to impose punishment (ll.12, 15). The narrator's final line impels God to 'smite a rock,' to set free the stream of tears from her stony heart. The narrator's repentance comes to figure more prominently than Christ's death, an indication to the reader that she should also seek absolution and recognize her sinful ways. As Rossetti states in "'Thy Servant will go and fight with this Philistine'" (V), the believer should consistently seek death to convince God she is truly penitent, 'never stint[ing] | Body or breath or blood' but always demonstrating 'proof in grace,' prepared to 'Die for thy Lord, as once for thee thy Lord' (ll.12-14). The bloody image of the

crucifix, then, focuses the believer's attention on how she should present herself before God.

Rossetti may have derived her ritual emphasis on Christ's blood from Williams' sonnets, inspired, according to G. B. Tennyson, by a 'Continental Catholic piety' which would have appealed to the Anglo-Italian poet.<sup>103</sup> Harrison too observes that Williams is 'remarked upon repeatedly in [Rossetti's] letters,' and, as I shall discuss, his tract, 'On Reserve,' had a profound effect upon the poet.<sup>104</sup> Williams' focus on the crucifixion in his collections, *The Cathedral* and *The Altar*, however, suggests a narrator embroiled within the Gothic horror of Christ's physical suffering, rather than using it, like Rossetti's speaker, as an expression of her own guilt and focusing image for meditation.<sup>105</sup> Williams' narrator relives Christ's death as a sensual experience, implicitly condemning humankind rather than expressing his own individual sense of contrition. The judgement Williams' narrator implies offers little consolation to the inquisitive believer, who is damned merely by the act of reading the poem. As the narrator of 'The Cross Dripping Blood' states (*Altar*, XXII):

Blood from His Hands is falling, drop by drop,  
 And from his Temples; now in streams they roll –  
 Haste downward to the earth as to their goal;  
 Now hang on His pale Body, and there stop,  
 Or on the wood below; till from the top  
 Unto the base the blood-stains mark the whole (ll.1-6).

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<sup>103</sup> G. B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), p.168.

<sup>104</sup> See the 'Prefatory Note' to *Seek and Find* in which Rossetti states: 'In writing the following pages, when I have consulted a Harmony it has been that of the late Rev. Isaac Williams'; see also Harrison, *Christina Rossetti*, p.69.

<sup>105</sup> Isaac Williams, *The Cathedral or the Catholic and Apostolic Church in England* (Oxford: John Henry Parker; London: J.G. and F. Rivington, 1838); *The Altar: Or, Meditations in Verse on the Great Christian Sacrifice (With numerous illustrations)* (London: James Burns, 1847); further references to these editions



The narrator graphically confirms the butchery of crucifixion by depicting a faded and beaten Christ whose blood dribbles down his body, dangling off his frame and then soaking the cross on which he hangs. Individual souls are compared to drops of blood dripping onto the cross of Paradise and drenching it with ‘the value of each human soul,’ making up a larger body of Christian faith with a strength to ‘outweigh the world’ (ll.7-8). As part of this body, the believer is instructed to accept Christ’s death with a ‘penitential love,’ expressing her recognition that Christ died because of human sin (l.11). She must thus beg for forgiveness through prayer and a ‘discipline of grief,’ rather than an indulgent misery (l.14).

Rossetti is not quite so harsh on the believer, merging the sinner with Christ in “‘A Bundle of myrrh is my Well-beloved unto me’” (V). Here, the narrator is reminded of Christ’s death as she catches sight of a cruciferous flower whose four petals form the shape of a cross. Gazing upon it, the narrator realizes that each living being bears its own ‘lowly-statured’ cross, albeit one which falls into nothingness against the enormity of Christ’s rood. Yet, like the flower, Christ’s death animates the world, and the narrator’s point that the ‘Cross alone’ is ‘life-giving, glorious’ is added to encourage the believer to take up her cross with energy and pride, therefore emulating the power the crucifixion endowed (l.5). By acknowledging the cross she must bear, the believer creates a bond between herself and Christ, each supporting their burdens as ‘cross calls Cross racking and emulous’ (l.10). The believer’s torment contributes, not simply to a greater Christian good as in Williams’ sonnet, but to the believer’s own sense of significance within the world, intimating to the reader that she too has a specific role within God’s scheme. An individual rather than part of a condemned crowd, the believer is invited to consider the implications of her position as a Christian.

Rossetti’s prayers also reinforce the gravity of adopting a crucified identity, and she entreats Christ to ‘make us all’ take ‘up our cross in daily penitence and patience’ like St Andrew, who ‘hung two days testifying’ Christ’s word to unbelievers in Achaia

before dying in prayer (*AD*, Prayer 173; *TF*, p.228). As she argues in *Time Flies*, Christ is reminded of the believer's faith when he sees her bearing the cross of her own suffering, held within 'each warm human heart' (*TF*, p.85). Rossetti implores, 'If His Cross be not there, "what good shall my life do me?"' (p.85). If Christ's message could be reduced to 'One word,' Rossetti suggests further in 'What is it Jesus saith unto the soul?' (*V*), it would be to "'Take up the Cross'" in hope of reaching heaven, 'for 'none may be | Without a cross' who 'hope to touch the goal' (ll.1-4).<sup>106</sup> With true faith, the narrator states here, the heavy cross 'will not weigh' any more than the individual can bear, and even if it does 'crush thee to thy knee,' Christ's grace 'shall be thy dole' to assist in such hardship (ll.5-8). Reminded at the close of the poem of the unpredictable nature of 'tomorrow,' the believer is overawed by the judgement that will await her hoped for entrance into heaven, increasing the import of bearing the cross further (ll.11, 14). At the same time, the believer learns that the endurance of worldly ill is ultimately a productive hardship which benefits her as an individual, stressing the importance of a religious feeling born of contemplation.

Dying for God, Rossetti suggests in these poems, is not simply an experience of physical pain (as Williams is better at reminding us), but also a mentally exhausting procedure which drains the believer of her intellectual faculties. Without the strain of intellectual thought, the believer could not reach heaven, as 'The Ruined Cross' (*PPP*) demonstrates. The poem narrates the story of a young girl travelling to an unspecified goal, weakened and flushed by her exhaustion but 'hurr[ying] on' as if attempting to reach heaven (ll.3-4, 6, 9). Everything around her seems decayed and changed in her eyes, impressing an apocalyptic doom on the verse, and yet she is unable to pause, transfixed on what she moves towards (ll.13-16). The girl finally halts with a forbidding awareness at a 'lonely spot' wherein a ruined crucifix stands 'o'er grown with moss and flowers' (l.33). The 'quiet vale' is remembered from childhood as a place full of love and security, but she has arrived here now in order to 'look again upon that Cross, | To

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necessary, are signified by the titles *Cathedral* and *Altar*.

look again and die,' falling to her knees beneath it like the biblical mourners, trembling and pale 'within its sacred shade' (ll.30, 32, 35-36, 41). The fearlessness she radiated in line three of the poem fades as she is overcome by a tearful acceptance of 'love and joy unknown,' praying with thanks 'Until her heart' is 'satisfied' and ready for death (ll.43-46). The cross crucifies the young girl into a new life, proceeding to await the next believer, 'standing yet' to give a sense of historical continuity with the medieval church so important to the Tractarians and highlighting human mortality through its own steadfast nature (ll.47-48). Like the young girl, each believer is destined to follow her journey, fervently striving for a union with Christ. Such a union, Rossetti contends, is made possible by the serene yet familiar emotions the calvary evokes in its creation of a venerated and ritual aura in which the believer can think and thus repent.

Rossetti's vision of the believer's sedate relation to Christ is replaced by Williams by one of anger in 'The Crucifix' (*Cathedral*, XXIII), the narrator furious at the injustice of the execution and eager to be pierced with the same 'Nails of stern discipline' that made Christ's 'pure hands bleed' (ll.6-7). Old Testament wrath prevails as the narrator claims that only 'rough arts' will 'breed | Keen penitential yearnings' to absolve 'the pride | Of the rude scoffing world' (ll.7-9). 'Whatever scourge may strike,' the narrator argues, none will be as severe as Christ's execution and he cries: 'So bind me to Thy Cross, that I may die | Daily, the fleeting years that I remain' (ll.12-14). The sense of urgency inherent to the narrator's plea to die daily, that is, experience pain in regular doses, echoes through Rossetti's 'The Ruined Cross,' but the young girl resists the desire to be physically strung up, already mentally tortured enough and confident that God will be her judge in death. Where Williams focuses upon physical pain, Rossetti explores the mental and thus intellectual struggle involved in fully perceiving God's word.

Rossetti also comments on this intellectual anguish in her sonnet, "'Out of the Deep'" (*UP*) in which the narrator cries for mercy, confessing that she 'can hardly bear

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<sup>106</sup> Rossetti also includes the sonnet in *Time Flies*, March 17, p.54.



life day by day,' her indolence betraying restlessness and dissatisfaction with God's command (ll.1-2, 5). Her prayers, she complains, are simply 'unprayed' by her sins and she demands to be either condemned or absolved, dealt with one way or another, asking: 'When will Thy judgement judge me, Yea or Nay?' (l.6). Only the unearthly and ritualist image of Christ 'faint upon the cross' possesses the power to pierce her with a sense of pure sorrow wherein she is convinced of Christ's 'Unutterable craving for my soul' (ll.8-11). The crucifixion 'haunts't [sic]' her to the point where she sees it is her own weakness that has made her path so weary, acknowledging, 'Lord: I, not Thou, forsook | Myself,' and the reader is left with a picture of fierce and desperate repentance (ll.9, 12-13). The narrator's initial condemnation of God becomes revelatory of her own sinfulness, a progression inspired by the melancholia of the crucifixion. The desire for forgiveness is as strong here as in 'The Crucifix,' and yet where Williams' narrator craves injury, Rossetti's is already suffering, albeit internally, moving between brusque expression and austere self-loathing in her exchange with God. Belief, Rossetti implies, is necessarily accompanied by a feeling that one is not good enough to assert Christian faith. The believer is thus riddled with a kind of cancerous guilt here that cannot be relieved on earth and might not be acquitted in heaven, her body unscarred, but her heart and mind wounded. The guilty believer is necessarily a thinking believer for Rossetti, however, dwelling on her wrong-doings in a pietistic state of contrition and afraid that God will reject the offerings of an unworthy sinner.

All Rossetti's believer may offer God, then, is her guilt, the narrator of "'When I was in trouble I called upon the Lord'" (V) remarks, for example, begging God not to overlook her good intentions, even if they are buried within her multiply depraved character: 'if Thou wilt not yet relieve, | Be not extreme to sift: | Accept a faltering will to give | Itself a gift' (ll.13-16). Divine approval of this sacrifice would itself grant relief from her 'burdened heart that bleeds and bears | And hopes and waits in pain,' as her guilt cuts deep into both mind and body, lacerating her with a 'torturing sting' whose only antidote is mercy (ll.1-2, 7). Mercy itself remains valuable to the thinking believer

in Rossetti's verse, her mind and body rescued from guilt by it, and then re-tuned to continue a Christian life made possible by the crucifixion. The believer must discover the import of Christ's death, not by endeavouring to feel the pain he suffered – an unrealistic task – but by experiencing an intellectual equivalent in which she must work to understand the relevance of the event. Such insight into Christ's suffering leads the believer into a realization of her dependence on Christ and therefore accentuates the importance of seeking forgiveness. As Christ refuses to reject the believer, so the believer must not reject him, often blamed when faith is tested. Rossetti too warns her reader to refrain from spurning any other being, for fear of becoming tainted morally, intellectually, and thus spiritually.

The perils of repudiating others are addressed within 'Despised and Rejected' (*PP*), a poem which reinforces the idea of ritual as the most thoughtful mode through which to communicate with God. The narrative maps a dialogue between the narrator and a 'stranger' representing Christ, who sweeps in from line eight asking the narrator, 'Friend, open to Me,' a phrase that capitalizes the pronoun to announce Christ's presence (l.8). The narrator disregards the stranger's calls, locked in his own 'bitter night' of 'evil' and wary of an unknown intruder after locking out the 'hollow friends' as he already has done (ll.4-7). Afraid even to acknowledge the stranger directly, the narrator internally soliloquizes: 'Who is this that calls? | Nay, I am deaf as are my walls' (ll.8-9). He disavows the Christ figure's cries of 'hope and fear' because they seem too close to his own relationships with friends both 'dear' and wanton, having chosen to reject the world because of the latter (ll.11-13). As the stranger calls 'Friend, My Feet bleed,' the narrator responds, 'Go on thy way footsore,' provoking the Christ figure to announce the urgency of responding to his appeal for the marks it may score against him on Judgement Day (l.19). After roaring at the outsider to leave him alone, the narrator threatens to 'chase [the stranger] from my door' in an expression of rage that is deaf to Christ's further pleas of 'Open to Me' and 'Rise, let Me in,' cries uttered with tears and desperation (ll.35, 39, 41-2).

The intense despair and pain of the Christ-stranger rises through the poem, accentuated at the end as he sobs: 'My Feet bleed, see My Face | See My Hands bleed that bring thee grace, | My Heart doth bleed for thee' (ll.45-47). Fashioned as a beaten and bloodstained martyr, Christ's voice and footsteps fade like the brittle faith of the narrator. Only on 'the morrow' does our untrusting miser notice crimson smears 'upon the grass' where the stranger has laboriously dragged his feet, each 'footprint marked in blood, and on my door | The mark of blood for evermore,' bearing a heavy and foreboding sign of Christ's apocalyptic significance (ll.55-58). Christ's blood serves two purposes here: first, to recall those stains marked upon the cross, evoking Christ's sacrifice; and second, to enact the Eucharist rite as the blood soaks into the door as into the believer receiving communion. The permanent nature of Christ's blood in the poem reminds the reader, not only of Christ's everlasting forgiveness, but of an enduring Catholic ritual, signified clearly through the emphasis on the crucifix and communion blood. The poem ultimately conveys Rossetti's emphasis upon ritual as an essential element for reaching God. While the Eucharist ostensibly transcends logic and therefore intellect, here it focuses the believer on her relation to and consumption of Christ, forcing her to think about the sacrifice of which she is part.

Rossetti's rendering of the cross and crucifixion, then, served to concentrate her reader's thoughts on the suffering Christ, and thus accept the anguish of being a Christian on earth. The agony the believer feels through contemplating Christ's death parallels the arduous task of acquiring religious knowledge, but equally stresses the importance of such education. While great strength is required to undertake such training, Rossetti presents the reader with examples of those who have succeeded, namely the saints, mediators between the believer and God and indicative of Christian perfection. Looming figures in many ritualist churches, the saints were invoked within ritual Tractarian ceremony, and it is to Rossetti's poetical representation of them that I now turn.



## (ii) Called to be Saints

Rossetti's reverence for saintly ethereal beings is most obvious in her hagiographic *Called To Be Saints: The Minor Festivals Devotionally Studied* (1881), a discussion of the black letter Saints.<sup>107</sup> Within this study, the poet betrayed a ritual admiration for the saints frowned upon by the conventional 'Protestant' tradition in the Church of England. In the twenty-second article of *Thirty-Nine Articles*, for example, the invocation of saints is rejected as a form of vain idolatry which takes the 'form of a grotesque polytheism' in its obscuration of God, obstructing the believer's personal 'mediation' with Christ at the same time.<sup>108</sup> The saints remained central to Tractarian worship, however, accessible to humanity where the secrets of God were not and able to provide intercessory prayer in order that the believer might move closer to her spiritual goals. They also stood as intellectual guides, often great orators, poets and theologians able to interpret God's word in a manner the educated Christian might understand. For Rossetti, the saints provided a powerful emblem of intellect and devotion, and those poems wherein she invokes them read like a ritual litany of the saints.

Rossetti safe-guarded her portraits of the saints from anti-Papists, however, by overtly declaring Christ's supremacy over them in order to dissociate herself from 'Romanist' idolatry. Christ is championed as 'better than Thy saints' in "The Chiefest among ten thousand" (V); and in "Half Dead" (V), the saintly trainee 'Christs' can merely emulate their Lord, praying to 'grow more like Thee day by day' (l.6; l.12). "Half Dead" closes with a resolute reminder that even when saints 'succour' the believer, they cannot take the place of Christ as the narrator concedes: 'It was not they died for us, it was Thou' (ll.14-15). Such generic salutes do not detract from the intensity of Rossetti's poems about saints, however, wherein they either rescue Christ

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<sup>107</sup> The 'black letter saints' are lesser, non-scriptural figures, distinct from the major saints who are marked by red letters in the Book of Common Prayer Calendar.

<sup>108</sup> Reverend E. Tyrrell Green, *The Thirty Nine Articles and The Age of the Reformation: An Historical and Doctrinal Exposition in the Light of Contemporary Documents* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton and Co., 1896), pp.146, 160-1.

from a bloody predicament or rise spectre-like before the believer complete with the gashes and cuts of a martyr. The saints in “‘Before the Throne, and before the Lamb’” (V) enunciate ‘the voice of an unclouded thundering’ as Christ rises before them, expressing their misery at the pain he has suffered and enclosing him within their ranks (l.2). The saints form a circle around Christ to demarcate a sacred ground in which the cleansing of souls may take place, beginning by laundering his blood-drenched garments with the white glare that shines from their purity. Christ’s once muddy clothes are newly depicted as a ‘raiment [of] white’ that the saints have ‘slowly spun’ from ‘blood-steeped linen,’ and in turn, their own luminosity sparkles more intensely than before (l.8). Such luminosity illustrates spiritual and intellectual perfection, a brightness towards which Rossetti strives as I explore in chapter five’s discussion of the poet’s symbolic use of the colour white.

The saints of ‘All Saints: Martyrs’ (V) also radiate a shining and fiery glow as they enter into ‘New Jerusalem,’ revitalized by Christ who grants them eternal life ‘for evermore’ (l.2, 5). Lavishly rendered by Rossetti as ‘All luminous and lovely in their gore,’ the saints here mirror Williams’ depiction of Christ as a ‘bleeding spectacle,’ and this intensifies the Gothic overtones of Catholic sainthood in the poem (‘All Saints: Martyrs,’ l.3; ‘The Holy Land,’ *Cathedral*, XXVI). Even when steeped in their own sacrificial blood, Rossetti’s saints remain radiant, their purity sanctioning their holiness as the narrator of ‘Lord, what have I that I may offer Thee’ (V) confirms, saved by ‘Clean-handed lovely saints’ that uplift her from her lowly and sinful position (l.12). Elevated into a sin-free position, the clean bodies and spirits of the saints evoke a simplicity that wards off any worldly complication of either nature or society, sheltering them from the same ‘buffeting winds’ that attempt to probe the narrator of a poem such as ‘Winter: My Secret’ (*GMOP*). Situated on their hallowed plane, the saints of ‘All Saints: Martyrs’ look ‘Toward consummated throne and diadem’ to be crowned with a glory indicating their intellectual, as well as spiritual, triumph (ll.4, 8).

The same passionate and inflamed image of sainthood appears in the sonnet 'All Saints' (V), as the saints drift 'like a stream of incense launched on flame' from 'death to life above' (ll.9-10). Catapulted on such a divine explosion, the saints spread their incense-filled haze around so that heaven begins to resemble the intense interiors of Christ Church or St Albans (l.11). It is here, in the midst of a metaphorical ritual ceremonial, that 'God makes glad His Saints,' both 'Numbered and treasured by the Almighty Hand' like stars or 'grains of sand' (ll.14, 1-2). The representation of the saints as tiny fractions of a larger body in 'All Saints' connotes to Rossetti's reader that she too will be joined with this final heavenly mass once absolved in paradise, envisioning sainthood as the ultimate goal of all believers. In 'Thy lovely saints do bring Thee love' (V), both pilgrim Christian and saint are deemed alike, the former offering God 'sin and tears' as the saints bring 'love, | Incense and joy and gold': all accepted within heaven and so reaching an equal status of God's chosen people (ll.6, 1-2). This levelling procedure is made possible by the force of Christ's 'boundless Love,' the saints little sparks that bounce from Christ's fire in line fifteen, merging to form one 'drop' (ll.15-16).

In 'Quinquagesima' (V) too, a poem named after the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, love is deemed the only pure law, free from the 'presupposed [ . . . ] taint' of all others partly due to its association with the saints (l.2). As the narrator declares: 'Love is the law from kindled saint to saint' who, like the ideal Christian, both 'learns and teaches' (ll.3, 7). The religious intellect, Rossetti suggests, expands while passing on scriptural truths as much as when it studies God's word. The saints provide endorsement for such religious education and the narrator appeals to them through the figure of love to 'teach me, Love, such knowledge as is meet | For one to know who is fain to love and learn' (ll.13-14). The word 'fain' here alerts us to Rossetti's perception that love and knowledge are inseparable and inescapable: the Christian must engage in this study in order to understand her own faith. This study is reliant on lectures directed at the heart as well as the mind, and Rossetti urges her reader to fulfil both passion and



intellect to assume the role of the Christian, refraining from undermining either as secondary to the other. Her narrator in “‘So great a cloud of Witnesses’” (V) communes with God through both heart and mind, stabilizing her faith by both recalling the songs of the saints as aural lessons in Christian values; but also feeling them as an inspiration. The saints literally ‘flock’ to her like an army of tutors, a forceful symbol of education’s revived importance within Tractarianism (l.7).

The grandeur of the saints en masse is consistently remarked upon by Rossetti, who envisions this power in ‘All Saints’ (P) through short and tersely written lines that spiral through the poem like the saints’ holy invasion weaves through the world. Flocking from every compass point, the saints rise irresistibly from ‘Swamp or sand, | Ice or burning [ . . . ] Up the steep of Zion | They are mounting, | Coming, coming, Throngs beyond man’s counting’ (ll.7-8, 16-19). Driving through everything they encounter, the saints are ‘Like innumerable bees | Swarming, humming,’ gathering more vigour as they move on:

With a thunder  
Like the ocean when in strength  
Breadth and length  
It sets to shore;  
More and more  
Waves on waves redoubled pour (ll.32-37).

The speed of these lines reflects the pace with which the saints move towards heaven, ‘their land | Of rest,’ and offers an analogy to the manoeuvres of the gathering saints in “‘So great a cloud of Witnesses’” (ll.46-47). As exemplary Christians, the saints invoke a brisk and alert believer who wastes no time in setting forth on her spiritual journey but develops a heightened awareness of the world in order to learn as she goes.

The ideal Christian must be 'quick' in both a spiritual and mental sense, then, understanding that even silence invites one to think. The serenity of ritual ceremony, for example, implies that very importance of contemplation and thought I suggest here. For the narrator of "'So great a cloud of Witnesses,'" the saints dwell in just such a state of silence, tranquil symbols of the rapturous insight of heaven the thinking believer will eventually attain:

O sights of our lovely earth, O sound of our earthly sea,  
 Speak to me of Paradise, of all blessed saints to me:  
 Or keep silence touching them, and speak to my heart alone  
 Of the Saint of saints, the King of kings, the Lamb on the Throne (ll.9-12).

Silence in the form of intuition is equal in importance to spoken knowledge here because it transmits emotional instruction delivered by mediating saints which aid the believer's struggle to reach God both spiritually and intellectually. To reach such a goal is paramount for Rossetti who invests in the saints as path-finders to God, tutors aiding her struggle towards heaven. In all their splendour, the saints are repeatedly revered by Rossetti as figures who have felt the same pulls and temptations as other Christians, but were able to renounce all for God. The narrator of 'Cast down but not destroyed' (V), for example, expresses amazement at such faith, looking upon the saints as beings able to endure worldly enticements and disappointments with inviolate virtue, and declaring: 'Thy Saints have lived that life, but how can I?' (l.2). Christian renunciation is too much for the narrator who falters like 'a leaf trembling' before God, describing herself as a flying wheel that tumbles off the religious path, unable to sustain or stabilize faith (l.7). Where the saints can 'pent passions in a house of clay, | Fear and desire, and pangs and ecstasies,' she is simply frustrated, recognizing the state of 'overjoy' that issues from faith but too unworthy to assume such a position (ll.11-14). For the narrator, 'overjoy' can only result from a saintly joy rooted in the denial of worldly pleasures – not really

joy at all then for the weak Christian – encouraging the reader to perfect her religious knowledge to secure a place in heaven, while warning her of the sacrifice such fulfilment entails.<sup>109</sup>

Rossetti reminds her readers that even the fate of the saints is unspoken until the final epiphanic elevation into heaven, however, asking in ‘Vigil of the Annunciation’ (V): ‘their tomorrow’s rest what tongue shall say?’ (l.15). While the narrator concedes that entrance into heaven is marked by a ‘sweet heavenly chime,’ she is adamant that no revelation will be announced until the believer shifts her mindset to combine rational curiosity with pious faith (l.4). Until then, the ‘prime’ glory of heaven remains ‘unutterable’ and the believer must be content with the promise that ‘strife and anguish’ will cease (l.5, 10). Rossetti insists that the believer must never stop pursuing a religious education, stating in ‘Lift up thine eyes to seek the invisible’ (V) that one should always ‘choose the still unseen’ over the material vanities of society (ll.1-2). The believer must at least attempt to ‘scale the exceeding height where all saints dwell,’ and the narrator here calls up to the saints in heaven to check if all is well with them, to which they

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<sup>109</sup> The joy Rossetti refers to here is ascetic in character, achieved by extremes of self-discipline serving to purify the soul and rid the body of carnal feeling. The Oxford Movement impelled the believer to practice such self-denial and bodily mortification through marathon prayer sessions, alms-giving, extremes of fasting and occasional acts of masochism, see Nockles, *Oxford Movement*, p.184. By doing so, the believer strives to imitate Christ’s sacrificial life and death as well as the lives of the saints, reaching an ascetic ideal upheld by Tractarians after its endorsement by Roman Catholicism. Asceticism was particularly important for the Oxford Movement because of its stance on the uses of the intellect in devotion, at once a disciplined and trained force that grounds faith, but also that which cannot reach the profound understanding of God. As the ascetic withdraws into a solitary and disciplined routine, she enters an almost pathological state wherein everything must be controlled and perfected, aided by a thorough knowledge of sacraments, doctrine and religious wisdom. Yet the ascetic must be aware that no practice, however pure, can reach the example of Christ and that all scholarly understanding must always submit before the overwhelming insight of God. For Pseudo-Dionysius, the believer must be willing to fall ‘into that darkness which is beyond intellect,’ a phrase that implies one must reach the heights of intellectual ability to earn the right to move past it into heaven, Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* (c.500), in Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.106; Pseudo-Dionysius (c.500) was a mystical theologian and Syrian monk who modelled himself on Dionysius the Areopagite, a follower of St. Paul whose conversion is noted in Acts 17. 34; for his works, see Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Writings*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (London: S. P. C. K., 1987); for a short discussion of the significance asceticism held for the nineteenth century, see Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush’s ‘Introduction,’ in *Asceticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); for a general introduction to asceticism, see Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987). The rewards to be found here resemble darkness for Pseudo-Dionysius because they are unknown, transcendent of the greatest intellect and so powerful enough to invoke the intense faith and loyalty Rossetti portrays.



answer 'Yea, it is well' (ll.4-5). The saints have been recompensed as promised, leaning 'over golden harps unspeakable' and indulging in the most palatial of luxuries because they 'stooped so low' on earth, rejecting futile riches for spiritual wealth (ll.6-9). The music of these golden harps makes no sound in the same way that heaven seems invisible, and Rossetti suggests that the redeemed must become 'purblind and deafened' in order to know 'glorious beauties unexperienced' (ll.9-10). While the intellect must get the believer to heaven in the first place, only prayer can secure everlasting glory as the poem attests, 'Golden Jerusalem float[ing] in full view' before her but closed off until she is fully worthy (ll.14). Heaven remains 'accessible tho' fenced' to encourage the believer to join God, but remind her that she is fenced off from him until intellectually and spiritually ready (l.13).

Rossetti's saints seem finally to be glorified teachers whose role consists of developing the believer's intellect, strengthening her understanding of scripture and doctrine and so securing her faith. The poet portrays the saints in four ways, then: first, as spectral beings that haunt and cleanse the believer; second, as powerful figures that sit with Christ in heaven; third, as intellectual and spiritual teachers that mediate between the believer and God; and fourth, as ascetic icons, invoked within the Catholic and Tractarian church as devotional examples to the aspiring Christian. Spiritual and intellectual directors, then, the saints aid the believer's entrance into heaven, and yet they cannot ensure the success of this process even after the subject's demise. The believer must wait until Judgement Day to be ultimately tried and Rossetti, not daring to assume a discussion of God's power of verdict, focused on the believer's experience of intense delay as she anticipated her final fate. For the Tractarian believer, however, those left behind could help to secure her place in heaven by praying in a ritual inherent to Tractarian ceremony. Such prayers were known as Prayers for the Dead, commented on in the *Tracts for the Times* and explained in a pamphlet by Littledale in 1867. I examine below Rossetti's portrayal of prayers for the dead, one marked by both the

Oxford Movement's daring, non-Anglican privileging of such supplication and Littledale's pamphlet.

### (iii) Prayers for the Dead

Prayers for the dead were offered for the deceased believer who waited, the Tractarians believed, within a dormant and hibernatory state of unconsciousness until reckoned by God. For Jerome McGann and Linda E. Marshall, this trance accorded with a specific condition known as 'soul sleep.'<sup>110</sup> Frozen into a prolonged period of extreme patience, the believer had to linger in what Marshall calls an 'intermediate state of the soul,' a place designated as Hades by scripture where the dead are held until judged and granted new life.<sup>111</sup> Rossetti describes how the spirit 'sleeps the long sleep that doth not dream' in 'Life Hidden' (*UP*), aware but unconscious: 'She doth not see, but knows: she doth not feel, | And yet is sensible,' her mind continually active (ll.2, 9-10). The poem closes by iterating the repose in which the sleeper lies, conveying that her 'spirit is at peace where Angels kneel' to emphasize the angelic inducement, and thus endorsement of such sleep.<sup>112</sup> While the believer remains partly cognizant in soul sleep, she remains caught in a static paralysis that Rossetti intimates might prevent her from praying further

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<sup>110</sup> Jerome J. McGann, 'The Religious Poetry of Christina Rossetti,' *Critical Inquiry*, 10 (1983), 127-45; Linda E. Marshall, 'What the Dead Are Doing Underground: Hades and Heaven in the Writings of Christina Rossetti,' *Victorian Newsletter*, Fall (1987), 55-60; Marshall undermines Rossetti's intellectual status by deeming her one who had little grasp of the issues surrounding 'the prophecies concerning the last days' here, quoting at face-value the poet's feigned confession in *The Face of the Deep* that the 'whole subject is beyond me' (p.342). I would suggest this admission reveals little more than Christian modesty and a preoccupation with saving souls rather than debating future events, and makes no sense anyway coming as it does almost two thirds through an elaborate five hundred and fifty-two page commentary demonstrating that the subject was clearly not 'beyond' her.

<sup>111</sup> Marshall, 'What the Dead Are Doing,' p.55, 57-58; Marshall contends that Rossetti employs three interpretations of Hades: first, as a Paradise where one meets old friends, prays for the living and furthers one's study of religious knowledge, as conveyed in 'Uphill' (*GMOP*); second, where one is asleep but longs for a 'lost corporeity' impelling her to return to the living world as a ghostly presence, as 'The Poor Ghost' (*PP*) and 'The Ghost's Petition' (*PP*) testify; and third, as a place where the believer enters soul sleep, as in 'From the Antique' (*UP*); the subject of 'soul sleep' and Hades in Rossetti's canon requires further study outside the limits of this thesis.

<sup>112</sup> Angels hold an elevated status for Rossetti, described in her little book *Angels* as 'messengers of God's will' who stand as a 'sinless and celestial' example to humankind, in Christina Rossetti, *Angels* (London: SPCK, 1910), p.13.

for her soul. Hence, the living must pray for her within church, a ritual to which Rossetti was fervently attached. For prayers for the dead pronounced Rossetti's duty as Christian to pray for the deceased, created a calm atmosphere in which one might think about death itself, and emphasized the role of Catholic tradition within Tractarian worship.<sup>113</sup>

Prayers for the dead were denounced by Protestant Reformers, who considered them to be scripturally ungrounded, unnecessary and purposeless. Many Protestants did not believe in purgatory anyway, and were thus unable to understand the relevance of praying for those beyond help.<sup>114</sup> The Oxford Movement reinstated the prayers, however, reprinting Archbishop James Ussher's seventeenth-century pamphlet on prayers for the dead as Tract 72 of *Tracts for the Times*, and widely defending the practice against anti-Catholic critics. Littledale's pamphlet, *Prayers for the Dead* (1867), also proved influential in highlighting the importance of its ceremonial mass and was almost certainly encountered by Rossetti.<sup>115</sup> First, he contended that the dead 'lose none' of their 'human character or privileges' and instead become 'real men and women after death, and not unsubstantial shadows,' thus obliging living believers to pray as their predecessors have done before (p.1: I).<sup>116</sup> The material reality of the dead as Christians still needing guidance seemed central to Littledale. Second, the preacher pointed out that the 1549 Prayer Book 'plainly recognized Prayers for the Dead,' requiring the believer to 'commemorate those departed in the faith and fear of GOD, that we, with them, may be partakers of the heavenly kingdom, which is as much a petition for them as for ourselves' (pp.1-2: V). Third, Littledale stated that even after death there remain 'sins unforgiven in this world which shall be forgiven in the next,' implying that the departed, locked into soul sleep, must look to the prayers of fellow Christians to save

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<sup>113</sup> The tone of immediacy accompanying Rossetti's portrayal of soul sleep reflects the Catholic belief that the clearly good are swiftly dispatched to heaven and the wicked to hell, granting only borderline cases purgatorial respite.

<sup>114</sup> Prayers for the Dead disappeared from the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1552.

<sup>115</sup> Richard Frederick Littledale, *Prayers for the Dead* (London: G. J. Palmer, 1867); further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text, stating the page number followed by the section number.



their souls (p.3: VII, e). Finally, he declares that the living must pray for the dead who leave the world ‘bearing the stains of earthly sin and error,’ which, as Littledale reminds us, ‘must be cleansed *somewhere* before they can be fitted for heaven’ (p.2: VII, d). Prayers for the dead, then, ask God to ‘purify, refresh, bless and perfect the souls of the faithful departed,’ ensuring the deceased is fit to join the saints in heaven who ‘cannot be made perfect’ until united with spiritually pure believers (p.4: IX).<sup>117</sup>

Rossetti’s poetical presentation of prayers for the dead adhered to Littledale’s, and both explored the Christian’s duty to engage in such prayer, recognizing the urgency of cleansing the deceased for entry into heaven. Moreover, prayers for the dead accentuated the import of the religious intellect: the living needed theological knowledge of what happens after death to guarantee their prayer, and its influence on the dead. Poems like ‘Burial Anthem’ (*PPP*) and ‘My Old Friends’ (*UP*) can be read as literal prayers for the dead, but Rossetti wrote more verse compelling the believer to undertake such prayer. In doing so, she implicitly urged the believer to contemplate the nature of Christian existence, asserting in *Time Flies*: ‘Let us thus think of all our dead, reverencing and hoping for them’ (p.67).

‘O ye, who are not dead and fit’ (V), for example, commands the living to provide the dead with compassionate comfort, letting love overflow into the realms of purgatory and beyond. Love actually poises the very ‘earth in space’ between its pivotal ‘poles’ for Rossetti, lighting ‘the sun,’ stars and ‘moon’s evanescent arc’ and serving as an animate force to aid lifeless believers (ll.7-12). Rossetti entreats her reader to ‘Sing notes of love: that some who hear | Far off inert may lend an ear,’ injecting the dead with a stirring melody that provokes them to ‘Rise up and wonder and draw near’ towards God (ll.16-18). Such music ‘[strikes] in heaven’ like a sacred language in ‘Christmas Carols: I’ (*P*, 1888), ringing like ‘a prayer-bell for a saint in dying, | Sweeter than a death-bell for a saint at rest’ (ll.5-6). Rossetti endows such prayers with a formal grace

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<sup>116</sup> Littledale names the ‘Liturgies of S. James, S. Mark, and S. Clement,’ amongst others, as advocates of Prayers for the Dead, p.1: IV; p.3: VII, g.

<sup>117</sup> Littledale directs the reader to Hebrews 11. 40 in his discussion of the Saints.

to rival the beauty of the liturgy, thus linking the living and the dead as similarly appreciative of aesthetic religious practice and its evocation of a space in which to reflect. In doing so, she underlines Littledale's appreciation of the dead as 'real men and women' who feel and ponder on the divine as intensely as a mortal.

Rossetti's figuration of the dead as able to think and feel as a result of prayer is depicted in 'Vigil of Saint Bartholomew' (V), where the dead are reanimated by their own unceasing worship which continues even as they collapse into soul sleep. The dead seem exhausted here, 'Hearts strung to prayer, awake while eyelids sleep,' waiting for a 'nourish[ing] power to wake and rise' that they might continue their worship marathon (ll.2-3, 4). Only prayer enables them to 'tread the uphill track to Paradise,' remaining always patient and thus making 'no moan' as if the very words of praise they utter catapult them up into heaven (ll.8-9). The intensity of their prayer suggests that they already 'half dwell in heaven,' an encouraging sign for the living believer whose prayers have begun to take effect (l.11). By praying for the swift arrival of the dead into Paradise, the believer sets a precedent for other Christians to pray for her when she encounters such a journey, aiding her final dialogue with God. For while prayer seems to be a kind of fuel that speeds one's progress up to heaven, it is useless without the divine validation of God, who must accept such prayers as genuine expression. Prayers for the dead, then, serve to ensure the success of this sanctioning process, one which might fail without the concentrated effort of the living. As Rossetti asserts in *The Face of the Deep*: 'A dead soul cannot requicken itself; if it is to be quickened, it can be so only by an act external to itself infusing new life,' an action which the living must fulfil in order to secure the fate of the dead (p.133).

Constantly concerned that her guilty soul will be stranded in purgatory without assistance, Rossetti condemned those who refuse to pray for the dead as inept and selfish individuals whose own need for prayer in death may too go answered. The male mourner in 'After Death' (*GMOP*) is presented as an apathetic yet threatening figure who fails to pray for the dead narrator, leaving her body 'cold' and static while 'he still

is warm' (l.14).<sup>118</sup> Overshadowed by the creeping silhouettes of ivy-leaves, the narrator's dormant body is watched over by the mourner who assumes that she sleeps, unaware that she understands the indifference of his dismissive, "Poor child, poor child" (ll.5-7). The mourner refuses to 'touch the shroud, or raise the fold' of the narrator's funereal garments, declining to even hold her hand, not because he is saddened, but due to his isolation as an unbeliever (ll.9-10, 13). While the mourner's stark pity seems to draw the sonnet to a close, the narrator announces how 'very sweet it is' that she is cold as he remains warm, her delight suggesting that she will be saved as a truly repentant believer and her lover damned to a dreary life on earth and denied a place in heaven at death (l.13). Rossetti ridicules the overly sentimental mourner as unaware of Christian basics such as praying for the dead, pointing out the pitfalls for those who remain spiritually uneducated.

As a more consciously Christian mourner, the narrator of 'Sweet Death' (*GMOP*) notes the importance of praying for the dead, wandering daily into 'the Church to praise and pray' for everything around her, vital and deceased. Walking through the graveyard surrounding her place of worship, she sees that even the 'sweetest blossoms die,' shedding their leaves 'on the graves' as a reminder that all that is young and beautiful ends underneath a headstone (ll.1, 5-6).<sup>119</sup> In turn, these blossoms sink into the ground as a nourishing force, returning to God's embrace as the believer after death and privileging 'sweet death' over life as the only route to heaven (l.12). Why then, the narrator asks, does the believer 'shrink from [her] full harvest?' in heaven and prefer to 'glean with Ruth' on earth (ll.23-24)? Rossetti invokes Ruth as a figure who experiences momentary happiness with Naomi before submitting to a tedious and inescapable marriage to Boaz, just as the waning believer expects to gain fulfilment from a dreary mortality dotted with rare flashes of bliss. The believer must transcend

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<sup>118</sup> For an alternative reading see Margaret Reynolds, 'Speaking Un-likeness: The Double Text in Christina Rossetti's "After Death" and "Remember,"' *Textual Practice*, 13:1 (1999), 25-41.

<sup>119</sup> While the content of 'Sweet Death' parallels that of Brontë's prose piece, *The Butterfly*, the narrator of Rossetti's poem attempts to transcend earthly reality for a distinctly Christian heaven, faithful where Brontë's narrator is not.



the fleeting satisfactions of life and look to the 'Rest and Ease' of the Lord, praying for her own safe-keeping after death as she prays for all subsumed by death, whether it be a flower or beloved (ll.21).

Where 'After Death' is devoid of any ritual atmosphere, 'Sweet Death' produces a contemplative and tranquil medium in which the believer may reach a point of sustained intellectual and religious contemplation climaxing in prayer. Rossetti suggests that the believer may only achieve intellectual insight when situated in a calm and ritual arena evoking meditation, either within the private space of her imagination, adorned with crucifixes and saints, or inside a church, where she can pray intently before a concealed altar. Her ritualist poetry, then, evokes what Walter Pater called a 'cloistral refuge' in which the religious scholar might contemplate theology and belief.<sup>120</sup> This refuge is forged both within the believer's place of worship and in her own consciousness: a quiet and studious realm which encourages thought. Such repose is evoked in 'You who looked on passed ages as a glass' (*UP*), where Rossetti deems ritualism a 'hush of nature' in which to 'think on Rome,' the scene of the triumphs of the early martyrs, respecting Catholicism's ancient authority, 'Not as it is now but as it once was' (ll.7-8). Even as Rossetti welcomes a medieval and Laudian alternative to the Church of England rather than a Roman and Italianate Catholicism, she remains respectful of the latter's tradition and followers, as her sonnet 'Cardinal Newman' (*SPP*) illustrates. As 'Champion of the Cross,' Newman is venerated for his part in re-establishing Catholic ritual within Anglicanism, turning from those who trivialize religion to those who intellectualize it, choosing 'love not in the shallows but the deep' (ll.1, 6). Ritualism does not signify submission to papal authority for Rossetti, but instead, grants her own faith a philosophical and spiritual dimension emphasized in Tractarianism's theologically tentative appropriation of Catholic rite.

Crucifixes, saints and prayers for the dead crowd Rossetti's poetry, then, adorning her writing as they embellished the Tractarian church and ceremony, enabling

the reader to intensify apparently simple verses with spiritual references to ceremonial practice. Such elements additionally serve as a shield behind which the God of her poetry resides, protecting him from the unworthy reader and signalling the mystery behind his methods to an increasingly unbelieving readership caught in an age intent on pronouncing the death of God. Rossetti counteracts such claims to secularization by cloaking God in an incense-filled ritual haze, intimating that while he may appear to be fading, he is simply hidden behind a heavy veil through which the unworthy cannot see. Rossetti's poems about ritual ceremony thus put into practice what she theorizes in her invocation of reserve: where ritualism fashions a space in which to think, reserve provokes intellectual thought. As the ritualistic traces in her poetry alert the reader to Rossetti's Tractarian faith, the implicit focus on reserve allows some insight into how she understood her faith: sincere yet private; simple yet mysterious; devotional yet intellectual. It is to the doctrine of reserve that I now turn, an idea which marked Rossetti's poetical presentation of her intellect and ruling that one should hold back her religious knowledge from unbelievers. As a poet wary of flaunting her profound grasp of Tractarian faith, Rossetti found that reserve justified and enabled her writing, and, when traced by the modern reader, underlines her position as a religious intellectual.

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<sup>120</sup> Walter Pater, *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan, 1910), in Harrison, *Christina Rossetti*, p.187.

## Reserving Faith in Rossetti's Devotional Poetry

This last chapter engages with Rossetti's reading of the Tractarian doctrine of reserve in her poetry and prose. Reserve was a concept which indicated that God's scriptural laws should remain hidden to all but the faithful, urging commentators on theology to encode or restrict their presentation of religious knowledge. Devotional poetry, biblical exegesis and theological commentary thus rendered religious truths through metaphor, figure and allegory in a manner only the initiated believer could understand. Preventing an increasingly literate secular audience from accessing scriptural law, then, reserve also indicated that some of God's tenets were simply beyond all human comprehension. For Rossetti, however, a religious education increased the believer's capacity to understand God's word, the content of which would be revealed finally in heaven to the faithful. The silent study space Rossetti forged in her ritual poetry provided an ideal environment in which to contemplate religion and God, a realm which locked out the unbeliever. As God had reserved his messages in scripture through parables, miracles and other coded narratives, so Rossetti withdrew her understanding of such scripture behind the ritual imagery I discussed in chapter four. Moreover, she even veiled her very reservation of such understanding in accordance with reserve, masking her advocacy of the concept and so giving her poetry an ostensibly simplistic, pious appearance.

Reserve, then, allowed Rossetti to adopt the role of theological commentator in her writing, reflecting on complex doctrines in a manner often refused to women. By hiding that which she debated through figurative and metaphorical language, Rossetti could not be accused of vainly flaunting theological learning unsuitable for a middle-class woman. Reserve even required the believer to adopt a restrained, submissive and therefore 'feminine' relation to religious investigation, and many male Tractarian



theologians were labelled effeminate and delicate because of their adherence to the concept. Rossetti's employment of reserve has implications for her persona as an intellectual because it stresses her private and contemplative nature, as well as her identity as a kind of cleric. Drawing attention to the doctrine of reserve, Rossetti both educated her readers in its intricacies, and exemplified the reserved believer who concealed what she knew. Even as she masked the intellectual foundations of her faith, Rossetti worked, however, to create a poetics that would be recognized as Tractarian by other believers. Like Stefan Collini's public moralist, Rossetti cultivated her image as a thinker within her poetry, rewarded by a readership who also recognized her a poet, devotional scribe and journalist.<sup>1</sup> Yet unlike Collini's man of letters, Rossetti is denied a thinking identity by current criticism, dissuaded from rendering her as an intellectual partly due to the reserved manner in which the poet presents her theological understanding.

For many critics, Rossetti's use of a reticent language indicates, not her understanding of reserve, but the poet's secretive and clandestine nature. As I suggested in chapter one, critics have focused on Rossetti's constant allusions to secrets and secrecy as evidence for child abuse or a broken heart, rather than as markers for her theological knowledge.<sup>2</sup> I argue instead that her references to secrecy emerge from her religious commitment to Tractarian reserve, a concept she reads with acumen and insight. In Part I, 'Reserve: Doctrine and Poetics,' I explore Rossetti's reception of reserve through Isaac Williams' 'On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge'

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the poetry and devotional prose discussed here, Rossetti wrote several short stories; thirty-six articles for the *Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography*, ed. John Francis Waller, 3 vols (London: W. Mackenzie, 1863), including entries on Giacomo Leopardi and Francesco Petrarca; and various articles for literary and religious journals, including *The Churchman's Shilling Magazine and Family Treasury*, *The Century Magazine* and *Literary Opinion*.

<sup>2</sup> On Rossetti's 'secrecy' see Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.357-359; Nadean Bishop, 'Sacred Frenzies: Repressed Eroticism in the Poetry of Christina Rossetti,' in *Reform and Counter-Reform: Dialectics of the Word in Western Christianity Since Luther*, ed. John C. Hawley (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), pp.139-152; Diane D'Amico, 'Conclusion: Secrets,' in *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender and Time* (Louisiana: Louisiana University Press, 1999), pp.173-77; Constance W. Hassett, 'Christina Rossetti and the Poetry of Reticence,' *Philological Quarterly*, 65:1 (1986), 495-514; Angela Leighton, "'When I am Dead, my

(1838-40), part of the *Tracts for the Times*.<sup>3</sup> Providing Rossetti with a scripturally detailed and scholarly evaluation of reserve, Williams' pamphlet forms the basis of the poet's own explication of the concept. This interpretive activity proves Rossetti's intellectual ability as a religious thinker, underlined further by the fact she presents reserve primarily through poetry. As Rossetti was aware, the Tractarians regarded poetry as the ideal genre through which to write about God in a reserved manner, an often figurative and abstract form which left the religiously educated reader to fill in the gaps. Both Keble's 'Sacred Poetry' (1825) and Newman's 'Poetry: With Reference to Aristotle's Poetics' (1829) illustrated that poetry's oblique and indirect way of expressing information rendered it the most reserved of writing styles, and I discuss Rossetti's familiarity with these two essays in this section.<sup>4</sup>

Part II, 'Rossetti Reads Reserve,' investigates the poet's employment of reserve in her devotional verse and prose. Reserve not only veiled Rossetti's many theological references, but was itself a doctrine that she reticently interpreted in her poetry. My consequent readings of Rossetti's poetry as reserved, then, compel me to first, highlight her references to Williams' pamphlet; and second, identify the manner in which she does betray her discussion of reserve. I argue that Rossetti's discloses her comprehension of reserve through two metaphors: the chancel screen and the colour white, both evocative of a hidden, sealed and pure space in which the believer can think. The chancel screen served as a material signifier of reserve, I argue, hiding God away and levelling the laity before him in a manner illustrated by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin's *Treatise on*

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Dearest": The Secret of Christina Rossetti,' *Modern Philology*, 87:4 (1990), 373-389; W. David Shaw, 'Poet of Mystery: The Art of Christina Rossetti,' in Kent, *Achievement*, pp.23-56.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Williams, 'Tract 80: On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge (Parts I-III),' in *Tracts for the Times by members of the University of Oxford*, 6 vols (London: J. G. & F. Rivington, St. Paul's Church Yard and Waterloo Place, Pall Mall; & J. H. Parker, Oxford, 1838), IV; and 'Tract 87: On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge (Conclusion: Parts IV-VI),' in *Tracts for the Times*, V; further references to these editions are given after quotations in the text citing the part, section and page number, and signified by the title 'On Reserve.'

<sup>4</sup> John Keble, 'Sacred Poetry,' *The Quarterly Review*, 32 (1825), 211-232; and John Henry Newman, 'Poetry: With Reference to Aristotle's Poetics,' *The London Review*, 1:1 (1829), 153-171, both in *Poets, Poems and Poetics in Nineteenth-Century Literary Journals*, ed. John Valdimir-Price, (London: Foundations of Literary Theory: The Nineteenth Century in Six Volumes, Routledge/Thoemmes Press,

*Chancel Screens* (1851), a pamphlet that I consider to be influential on Rossetti's short-story 'Pros and Cons' (1867). My investigation finally looks into Rossetti's reservation of her poetical narrators, concealed behind images of whiteness and winter to convey the poet's obsession with becoming spiritually and physically pure. The evocation of a whiteness within the poem creates a pure realm in which narrator and reader alike may contemplate God without distraction, as it bleaches away the narrator's discussion of religion. The arguments forwarded depend primarily on Rossetti's *Verses* (1893), but rely also on *Goblin Market and other Poems* (1862), *A Pageant and other Poems* (1881) and the devotional prose.

## I Reserve: Doctrine and Poetics

If ritual shaped a space wherein Rossetti might meditate upon Tractarian doctrine, reserve sanctioned Christian intellectual thinking, enabling but then veiling such thought to emphasize faith's predominance. The concept was an essential and controversial part of the *Tracts for the Times*, and pre-dated debates about ritualism more popular in the latter half of the Victorian age. Rossetti used ritual to map out a realm in which she might think about earlier Tractarian ideas for two reasons. First, Christ Church was an early proponent of ritual ceremony, assuming Catholic elements from the 1840s. Second, Rossetti encountered the Oxford Movement as a result of attending Christ Church, thus reading its 'high and dry' tracts at the same time as she marvelled within its incense-filled walls. It is through Christ Church too that I suggest Rossetti had access to Williams' tracts on reserve. While Keble and Newman's essays on poetry were more readily accessible in the journals *The Quarterly Review* and *The London Review* respectively, the *Tracts for the Times* were read predominantly by theologians and ordained Tractarians. Hence Littledale and Dodsworth would have certainly subscribed to the series, and, in close contact with Rossetti's intellectual development as a

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1995), pp.211-232, 153-17; further references to these essays are given after quotations in the text,



Christian, may have indicated its importance to her. The purpose of the following section is to outline William's analyses of reserve in order that I may convey Rossetti's reading of the concept in Part II.

### (i) Isaac Williams and Reserve

Williams' analysis of reserve grew from a lecture he delivered at the new Oxford theological society that met at Pusey's house, and was entitled 'On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge' by Newman. When published as a two-part number of the *Tracts for the Times* in 1838 and 1840 respectively, it was Newman's title, rather than Williams' arguments, which provoked a scandal, and one bishop is said to have condemned the pamphlet just because of its cover.<sup>5</sup> The Tracts submitted that because God is incomprehensible, the believer can only know him indirectly. Religious knowledge should hence be revealed to the believer according to her potential for apprehending it. G. B. Tennyson suggests that a 'practical application' of reserve may be seen in 'the traditional order of the worship of Mass,' divided into two halves so that those not yet confirmed could withdraw prior to the 'Eucharist proper.'<sup>6</sup> Such practice led to charges of secrecy, deviousness and popery that were irritated further by the introduction of auricular confession as I noted in chapter four. The often troubled manner in which Rossetti writes of secrecy and reserve intimates her awareness of the doctrine's contentious status, and Williams himself was forced to revoke his application to succeed Keble as Oxford Professor of Poetry in 1842 as a result of 'On Reserve.'

Williams' Tracts 80 and 87 on reserve are split into three parts which are, in turn, divided into between seven and fourteen sections, addressing the historical,

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signified by the titles 'Sacred Poetry' and 'Poetry.'

<sup>5</sup> John Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville and London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), p.10; Williams stated in 'On Reserve': 'If it is the name Reserve only which is objectionable, then let the substance of this article be expressed by any other which may be found equally to serve the purpose, whether it be forbearance, or reverence, or seriousness, or religious caution, as long as the full intention of it is equally presented' (V:2, pp.45-46).

philosophical and theological basis of reserve. The pamphlets are dense, lengthy diatribes on the subject of reserve and overwhelm the reader with references, notably to the Church Fathers and contemporary Tractarian preachers. Although expansive, 'On Reserve' discusses reserve in terms of five propositions: first, that it is supported by Christian tradition; second, that it ensures only the worthy obtain God's grace, highlighting parables and miracles as exemplary reserved genres; third, that it deems the intellect an important foundation for understanding scripture; fourth, that it enhances, rather than opposes the notion of revelation; and fifth, that it renders popular religion crude and irreverent. Williams' main objective throughout was 'to ascertain, whether there is not in GOD'S dealings with mankind, a very remarkable holding back of sacred and important truths, as if the knowledge of them were injurious to persons unworthy of them' ('On Reserve,' I:1, p.3). Finding this conjecture to be true, the preacher enters into a discussion of reserve often read by critics as a vindication of a difficult and abstract religious hierarchy on earth: impossible to define, absurdly elitist and extravagantly intellectual.<sup>7</sup> For Walter Walsh, these implications of reserve indicated a 'Crypto-popery' and 'crookedness' inherent to the Oxford Movement.<sup>8</sup> Walsh argued that Williams' Tracts on the subject of reserve 'set the whole of the Church of England in an uproar,' holding back the 'great secrets of Christianity' from all but those whom the Oxford Movement 'could trust their real and Romish doctrines concerning the Atonement, Faith and Works, Grace, the Sacraments, Priestly Absolution, and other

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<sup>6</sup> G. B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), p.45.

<sup>7</sup> Newman seemed more aware of the problematic nature of ideas that had the capacity to create blatant hierarchy and deceitful teaching; he suggested that reserve should be balanced with economy, that which reveals digestible fractions of religious knowledge in relation to the hearer, testing her ability to comprehend it and so judging how much knowledge is 'compatible' with their condition, in John Henry Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* [1832] (London: 1876), p.65, and *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* [1864] (London: Penguin, 1994), pp.239-240; see also Robin C. Selby, *The Principle of Reserve in the Writings of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.60.

<sup>8</sup> Walsh's attack on the Oxford Movement became so popular that a cheap edition was issued 'at the urgent request of a large number of friends of the Protestant cause, who are anxious to bring the book within reach of the working classes,' in Walter Walsh, 'Preface to the Popular Edition,' *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1899), p.iii.

doctrines.’ To Protestants, Walsh added, ‘this naturally looked like double-dealing and Jesuitism.’<sup>9</sup>

Williams desired reserve, however, not because of its Romish overtones, but due to its traditional use within the early church, the first of the five main defences of the concept I list above. For the Church Fathers, so Williams argued, all divine truths and mysteries were held back until the believer had become deserving enough to receive them.<sup>10</sup> The early church named this process the *Disciplina Arcani*, or the ‘teaching of the secret,’ described in the Tracts as an ‘external system of discipline’ in which the Latins ‘kept back in reserve the higher doctrines of our Faith until persons were rendered fit to receive them by a long previous preparation’ (‘On Reserve,’ IV:2, p.6). Williams also commented on the *Disciplina* in his collection of verse, *The Cathedral*, as that which withdrew ‘from the public view the Sacraments and higher mysteries of our Religion.’ He suggested here that this process was essential in order to express ‘reverence for the sacred mysteries’ and, notably, because it was considered ‘to the advantage of those who were thus excluded’ (pp.305-306). In other words, reserve kept back knowledge from unbelievers, not only as unworthy of it, but because any misconception they might make concerning God’s word would implicate them in sin. As a form of divine power, religious knowledge was highly dangerous in the hands of the unbelieving who might misinterpret its truths, belittle God’s mysteries and thus commit acts of profound blasphemy.

For R. W. Church, Williams’ ‘On Reserve’ achieved an angry ‘protest against the coarseness and shallowness which threw the most sacred words about at random in loud and declamatory appeals,’ defending his scholarly approach to theology against ‘the crudest and most vulgar conception of it.’<sup>11</sup> As Pseudo Dionysius explained centuries earlier: ‘it is most fitting to the mysterious passages of scripture that the sacred

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<sup>9</sup> Walsh, *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement* [Third Edition] (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1898), pp.8-9.

<sup>10</sup> O. W. Jones, *Isaac Williams and His Circle* (London: S.P.C.K., 1971), p.31.

<sup>11</sup> R. W. Church, *The Oxford Movement: Twelve Years 1833-1845* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co, 1891), p.230.



and hidden truth [ . . . ] be concealed through the inexpressible and the sacred and be inaccessible to *hoi polloi*. Not everyone is sacred, and, as scripture says, knowledge is not for everyone.’<sup>12</sup> Thus Williams’ emphasizes the second of the five imperatives I named above: that the unworthy be denied the relevant keys to interpret scripture and other forms of religious knowledge. The religiously worthy, Williams argued, must ‘throw a veil’ over their religious knowledge, obscuring its meaning and thus forcing the unworthy to work hard to understand God’s word and earn the right to moral truth. Mystical meaning can only be revealed to the disciplined believer, as Williams made clear with reference to Matthew 7:6: ‘Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you’ (‘On Reserve,’ I:5, p.10; IV:2, p.6). Quoting Origen, Williams asserted that ‘a good man [sic] would see that GOD had something better for those that waited for Him’ and while the faithful may long to know God’s secrets, their anticipation shows both respect and reverence towards Scriptural instruction (I:1, p.4). Patience was thus elevated as a primary virtue, grappled with by Rossetti as one keen to get to heaven, but conscious that she must remain submissive and composed in accordance with scripture.

For Williams, the Christian must get used to having meanings obscured, scripture’s very object to reflect and be analogous to Old Testament expression in a coded way. As the preacher stated, scripture had been ‘made to convey a lesson different from what is at first sight perceptible to a careless hearer’ (I:3, p.6). The careful hearer may decipher God’s message through parables and miracles, each disguising intensely divine mysteries underneath usually simple narrative tales, revealing much to the believer armed with the right knowledge. Where parables metaphorically compared divine truth to simple situations in nature or human affairs, miracles validated this truth by producing effects which transgressed the normal order of things through the intervention of God. The two genres are dealt with in much detail by Williams and I summarize here only his main points. Parables, Williams contended, are

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<sup>12</sup> Pseudo Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* (c.500), in Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian*

suggestive of reserve because regularly referred to as 'dark sayings': both biblically, in the Psalms and Matthew; and, critically, in the writings of Theophylact, rendering 'Parables as a veil,' accessible to all but covering its own ideas to prevent the imprudent from gross misinterpretation (I:4, p.10). As Williams declares, paraphrasing Chrysostom: Christ 'would have been silent' if he had 'not wished [believers] to hear and to be saved,' speaking in Parables so to test the believer's ability to interpret 'things overshadowed and darkened' (I:4, p.11).

Miracles are more complex still, Christ strictly forbidding the disciples to mention them in an attempt to prevent sceptics from witnessing such magical acts, and then continuing to deny God. For denial in the face of God's glory excludes the doubting subject from any future right to religious knowledge, therefore repealing any chance for salvation and forgiveness on Judgement Day. As Williams suggests: 'If the manifestation of the Divinity is made to [the people], and they still disbelieve, nothing more can be done [ . . . ] to see God Himself revealed and to deny Him, is a state in which all principle is gone' (I:5, p.14). When Jairus' daughter is raised from the dead in Matthew 9, for example, the narrator tells us that 'Jesus straightly charged' those who had perceived the phenomenon: 'See *that* no man know *it*,' knowing that many 'were not of a temper of heart fitted to witness such a miracle without injury to themselves' (Matthew 9. 30; I:5, p.18). By repressing the 'magic' of his miracles, then, Christ stops the unprepared from exploiting or misunderstanding God's word, thus saving them from mortal sin, and Christianity from charges of sorcery and ensuing persecution. Only the believer may penetrate through the reserve miracles, like parables, are embraced by, Williams suggests, an action enabled only by faith. Intellectual ability must, in turn, lay the foundation for such faith, but Williams makes it clear that scholarly effort lies secondary to devotion and moral perfection.

The believer, then, cannot reach the truths parables and miracles afford through mere intellectual aptitude. Such a relegation of intellectual command seems mistaken in

a pamphlet which is both structured in an academic manner, and draws heavily on a scholarly theological tradition, factors taken for granted by the university-educated writer. As Williams stated: 'One thing is certain, that the deep senses and hidden knowledge of Scripture, are intended to enlighten the heart and exercise the affections, not to gratify the intellect or try the ingenuity. With regard to any knowledge that is truly valuable, the unhallowed intellect can of itself learn nothing' (VI:6, p.104). In a section from 'On Reserve' entitled, 'It is of a moral, and not of an intellectual nature,' Williams expanded this argument, maintaining that 'hidden wisdom is entirely of a moral nature, and independent of any mere cultivation of the intellect' (II:4, p.40). The intellect merely 'puffeth up' the Christian, undermining her claim to virtue which is more simply realized by focusing on natural signs of divinity in the world and thus growing 'in the consciousness of God's presence' (II:4, p.40). Love and prayer win out over the intellect because they are, Williams suggested, 'actions of self-denial' disposing the heart to 'prayer, prayer to the love of God, and the love of God to the knowledge of Him' in all its secrecy (II:4, p.41).

Williams seems to repudiate the intellect, then, the third area of inquiry I argue he attached to reserve. As I suggested above, however, 'On Reserve' rather deems the intellect an important foundation for understanding God's word, always secondary to faith but fundamental to its power. For reserve to work in the first place, the worthy believer must own an almost exhaustive grasp of scripture and sweeping comprehension of the historical relevance of reserve. Knowledge must be gained, but Williams stresses that the intellectual process which allows and supports faith must be suppressed, denied and masked by love and prayer until it appears as if the intellect has no role in the acquirement of wisdom at all.<sup>13</sup> The preacher was even forced to emphasize the importance of intellectual research to faith making reference to St Augustine, who claimed that 'mysteries have to be unfolded because if easily understood "truth would

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<sup>13</sup> His own conception of the doctrine, for example, is grounded on its relation to apophatic or negative theology, but Williams refuses to explicitly discuss the subject even though it is everywhere apparent, see



neither be sought for with study, nor be discovered with delight,” endorsing the benefit of structured contemplation (‘On Reserve,’ IV:13, p.38). For St Irenæus too, ‘those things in Scripture which we cannot discover we ought to leave to GOD’ as they ‘envelop themselves in thickest darkness [ . . . ] in order to subdue pride by labour, and to recall the intellect from its fastidiousness, to which those things generally appear mean which are easily integrated’ (IV:9, p.27).

While faith and morality mark the believer’s advance towards religious knowledge, then, the intellect remains essential to her ultimate perception of it, and must be trained and developed accordingly. For Williams, such training depends upon the believer’s investment in self-discipline, fearing God’s judgement and so terrified into exercising extreme control over her body and mind in order that religious devotion be continually practised. Pusey’s asceticism and Rossetti’s breakdown are examples of such controlled piety as I noted in chapter four. As Williams contended, quoting Tertullian, ‘where GOD is, there is the fear of GOD, which is the beginning of wisdom,’ signalling that devotion of the kind expressed by Pusey and Rossetti indicated a sharp yet profound intellect (‘On Reserve,’ IV:5, p.14). Attempts to speculate on religious topics by any ‘other mode but that of practical obedience,’ Williams argued, provoke God to withhold knowledge and punish the believer ‘for the attempt’ (II:6, p.45). Such statements shocked many readers who believed that ‘On Reserve’ refused the notion of revelation, the fourth of Williams’ concerns highlighted here, therefore halting the dissemination of God’s word. Williams admitted that scripture was marked by a revelatory quality, disclosing ‘GOD’s goodness to His creatures’ (V:1, p.42). Yet he remained cautious of such revelation, and argued that if scripture is like a light that reveals or illuminates God, it necessarily casts shadows too. He asserted: ‘The comings and goings of our LORD are often significantly said to be with clouds; of Wisdom that [ . . . ] she “dwells in high places, and her throne is in a cloudy pillar”’ (V:1, p.43).

Like Rossetti's poetry, Williams' prose is lined with incessant references to shadows, veils, darkness and the invisible, a list of murky adjectives intimating to the reader that she must tear back the layers of his argument as she must gradually master God's truths. Religion and theology, Williams contends, should be progressively taught in the same way 'as any human science' but always 'spoken of with reverential holiness,' remaining unsullied by other, non-divine, disciplines. Above all, religion should not be tainted by civic or common discourse: politics, public preaching 'and the applause that accompanies it,' coarse art-forms such as Cockney School poetics or the crudely composed hymnal (V:2, p.47). Any consideration of Christianity as a 'popular system' was highly disrespectful toward God, argued Williams, and those who betray its sobriety can in no way be considered as an 'adequate and fair judge' in spiritual matters (V:2, p.47). Thus Williams used reserve to launch an assault on popular religion, the fifth and final area of debate I address here, conceived as a low and therefore inferior form of Christianity. He argued that Methodism and Evangelism were 'most under the influence of what is here condemned, to the great injury of their moral character' (V:8, p.78). The enthusiastic fervour associated with John Wesley's ideas provoked Williams to condemn the faith as boisterous and noisy, overly familiar with its laity and altogether too modern, 'founded on feeling [and] moved by every wind; it partakes of the weakness of human things [ . . . ] in professions and emotions, in popular appeals, and party zeal' (VI:4, p.97). As Isobel Armstrong contends, reserve signified a 'refusal to bring forth an excess of feeling and an assent to hidden meaning,' thus denouncing any 'democratic reading' of Christian doctrine.<sup>14</sup>

'On Reserve' does indeed promote the idea of an intellectual and spiritual elite, invoked by a subtle change of tone in its prose: the theories expressed shift from being the property of the author alone, to belonging to both the author and his readership. Thus reserve becomes that which is in '*our* favour' rather than in '*my* favour,' and a factional barrier is created against the wrong sorts getting hold of holy scriptural meaning (IV:4,

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<sup>14</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, p.341.

p.12). Such elitism, Williams argues, is necessary to the preservation of reserved religious knowledge which must be decoded through faith 'and by which we shall be judged at the last day,' as Christ commanded in the Sermon on the Mount ('On Reserve,' II:5, p.43). Elitism, however, may be the wrong word here, implying the creation of a hierarchy between believers and unbelievers. Instead, reserve implied that everyone could be worthy if prepared to engage with God with extreme reverence, using indirection when conversing upon his word and concealing the intellectual foundation on which such faith was based. As Tennyson asserts, reverence might be a 'better synonym' for reserve, indicating the mystery that clouds all religious matters.<sup>15</sup> Yet, if the believer could not address God directly, she had to strive to find a form which would both intimate the depth of her faith, and communicate religious law to those versed in its intricacies. This form was poetry, psalm-like and indirect, subtle and restrained, suggestive and reverent, and thus the ideal partner of reserve.<sup>16</sup>

## (ii) Tractarian Poetics

For G. B. Tennyson, Rossetti is 'the true inheritor of the Tractarian devotional mode,' putting into practice that which essays like Newman's 'Poetry' and Keble's 'Sacred Poetry' advocated in theory.<sup>17</sup> I second Tennyson's argument that Rossetti's poetry 'is frequently tied to established forms of worship and liturgical observance,' but claim further that such observance helped formulate, rather than merely echo a tradition of

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<sup>15</sup> Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, p.142.

<sup>16</sup> See Geoffrey Rowell, *The Vision Glorious: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.26.

<sup>17</sup> Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, p.198; for other statements of Tractarian poetical theory, one may turn to Keble's 'Tract 89: On the Mysticism attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church,' *Tracts for the Times by members of the University of Oxford*, 6 vols (London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1841); *De Poetica Praelectiones academicae Oxonii habitae, annis MDCCCXXXII-MDCCCXLI* (London: J. H. Parker, 1844); and his Lectures on Poetry delivered as Oxford Professor of Poetry between 1831 and 1841, in *Keble's Lectures on Poetry 1832-1841*, trans. by Edward Kershaw Francis, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), I; on Keble and reserve, see W. David Shaw, *The Lucid Veil: Poetic Truth in the Victorian Age* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), pp.66ff, 129ff; by Newman, see *Apologia*; and 'Sermons, chiefly on the Theory of Religious Belief, preached before the University of Oxford' (London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington; Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1843).



Tractarian poetics based on reserve.<sup>18</sup> Rossetti's poetical voice remained deeply affected by early Tractarian poetry, however, 'stanzaically experimental and inventive' such as that of Keble, Tennyson states, but preferring the 'brief line and concentrated utterance' like Newman.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, she used poetry to seek God and focus her reader on spiritual matters, a genre considered the most ideal expression of intense religious longing. As Keble contended, 'the very practice and cultivation of Poetry will be found to possess' the power of 'guiding and composing the mind to worship and prayer.'<sup>20</sup> Its status was further enhanced by its association with psalmody, a form Williams contended owned the power to clarify and calm the confused mind and which Rossetti used widely in *Verses*.<sup>21</sup> The Psalms too offered the religious poet a kind of handbook containing every theme and idea she might adopt and it was almost disrespectful for the poet to search outside of scripture for inspiration: originality was deemed futile. As Neale remarked in *Commentary on the Psalms*, completed by Littledale after Neale's death in 1866, 'I claim nothing but the poor thread on which the pearls are strung,' referring to the pearly wisdom of scripture.<sup>22</sup> Like the psalms, Williams intimated, poetry evoked deep religious feeling, 'always accompanie[d]' by 'reserve or retiring delicacy' ('On Reserve,' II:7, p.53). Like Analogy, wherein the unknown is made

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<sup>18</sup> Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, p.200.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p.202; it is notable that Newman contended that the Oxford Movement had been founded on the principles attached to Romanticism, the poetry of Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey a 'cause and symptom' of the ensuing belief system, rather than just a result, in *Apologia*, pp.99-100; Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey joined Scott and two clergymen, Alexander Knox and Thomas Sikes, in Newman's list of the six figures behind Oxford Movement thought; on Newman's list, see Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, pp.14-23; Hoxie Neale Fairchild too argues that the Tractarian and Romantic poets shared an interest in 'the familiar and the strange, the known and the unknown, the real and the ideal, the finite and the infinite, the material and the spiritual, the natural and the supernatural,' in *The Romantic Quest* (New York, 1965), in Michael H. Bright, 'English Literary Romanticism and the Oxford Movement,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40:3 (1979), 385-404 (p.388); on the shared interests of Romanticism and the Oxford Movement see also David Goslee, *Romanticism and the Anglican Newman* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996); Peter Benedict Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.324; and Owen Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960), p.12.

<sup>20</sup> Keble's *Lectures on Poetry*, II, in Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, p.33.

<sup>21</sup> Williams appealed to the 'gentle Psalmist' in 'Come to me Angel guests!' to: 'Come again, tranquil spirit, oh, unroll | Thy sweet melodious fulness o'er the tide | Of my wild tossing thoughts,' in *The Cathedral, or the Catholic and Apostolic Church in England* (Oxford: John Henry Parker; London: J. G. and F. Rivington, 1838), p.80 (ll.6-8).

<sup>22</sup> John Mason Neale, *Commentary on the Psalms* (1866), in Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, p.115.

familiar through comparison to a more common concept; and typology, which deemed that Christ's New Testament actions paralleled and thus clarified Jewish prophecy from the Old Testament, poetry helped render God accessible.

In this way, poetry owned what Geoffrey Rowell calls a 'cathartic function' for the Tractarians, fulfilling the subject's desire for the spiritual in a time when visible signs of Christ were doubted and neglected.<sup>23</sup> For Newman, poetry paralleled faith in its provision of 'the evidence of things not seen,' obliquely communicating God's truth and so connecting heaven to earth.<sup>24</sup> Keble too stated in Tract 89 that poetry is 'a channel of supernatural knowledge' to humanity, its most 'characteristic tendency' to 'make the world of sense, from beginning to end, symbolical of the absent and unseen.'<sup>25</sup> Poetry, then, represents God's truths indirectly like a parable, allowing only those armed with faith and knowledge to recognize what Keble called 'paraboli cal lessons of conduct' within poetry's 'symbolical language in which God speaks to us of a world out of sight.'<sup>26</sup> As religion struggles to 'express thoughts and feelings beyond the power of prose to describe,' Keble remarked recalling John Dennis, poetry steps in, taking 'us by the hand' and leading 'us into the hidden world of Nature affording a wealth of natural analogies' illustrating God's power and counsel. Only 'Poetry affords to Religion its store of symbols and its metaphors; Religion gives them back to Poetry, but sparkling in their new light, (so to say) more sacraments than symbols.'<sup>27</sup> For Keble, poetic language best conveys religious ideas and sentiments, a favour which religion returns by reconstituting the poem as a work of God, devouring each metaphor and spitting it back out in a new and glittering form.

In 'Poetry,' Newman suggested that such poetic language is born only from the poetical mind, a pure creation 'full of the eternal forms of beauty and perfection' and

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<sup>23</sup> Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, p.32.

<sup>24</sup> John Henry Newman, 'Sermons, chiefly on the Theory of Religious Belief,' in Chadwick, *Mind of the Oxford Movement*, pp.71-73.

<sup>25</sup> Keble, 'Tract 89,' p.185.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p.143.

<sup>27</sup> John Keble, *De Poetica Praelectiones academicae Oxonii habitae, annis MDCCCXXXII-MDCCCXLI* (London: J. H. Parker, 1844), in Chadwick, *Mind of the Oxford Movement*, p.70.

able to feel ‘a natural sympathy with every thing great and splendid in the physical and moral world’ (‘Poetry,’ p.160). Newman argued that all subjects can be moulded by the Christian poet in ‘the material of [ . . . ] composition’ because of her innate morality, endowing her with the ability to transform ‘a bare collection of facts or principles’ into a representation of Christ’s ‘beauty and harmonious order’ (p.161). While poetry is always ‘founded on correct moral perception,’ it is through ‘virtuous and religious feeling’ that the language becomes elevated, lifting the poet and her reader onto a higher, more spiritual, level of understanding (p.168). Religion is ‘especially poetical’ because ‘its disclosures have an originality in them to engage the intellect,’ recreating the Christian reader of poetry as one with ‘a super-human tendency’ for understanding the ‘divine meaning in every event’ (p.169). Hence, Christians have a ‘duty’ to secure ‘a poetical view of things,’ one which casts an ‘unearthly brightness’ across everything they encounter, but which also serves to ‘obscure’ them behind the poet’s mask of ‘contemplation rather than communication’ (p.170). Less forceful than the rather ‘rude’ instruments of rhetoric and narrative – ‘anger, indignation, emulation, martial spirit, and love of independence’ – poetry remains meek, gentle, compassionate, content and modest, mildly urging the reader into a position of devotional reserve.

The reserved poet is not passive or weak, however, but upholds a steadfast faith which is constant rather than excessive, engaging with poetry as a genre ‘which always shrinks from pouring forth everything.’<sup>28</sup> The poet, Keble argued in ‘Sacred Poetry,’ must beware of the pitfalls of indulgent ‘variety and imagery’ in her compositions, avoiding ‘intellectual pride’ in her work in order to remain spiritually focused (pp.217, 228). To wallow in luxuriant imagery was to approach ‘the most vicious of all styles,’ namely that urban mode of ‘Mr Leigh Hunt and his miserable followers,’ whom, for Keble, lacked the subtle spirituality of the devotional poet (p.216). Sacred poetry should follow the ‘grave, simple, sustained melodies’ of religious plain chant, ‘fervent, yet sober; awful, but engaging; neither wild and passionate, nor light and airy’ but marked

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<sup>28</sup> Keble, *Lectures on Poetry*, I, in Rowell, *Vision Glorious*, p.26.



with a 'noble simplicity and confidence in' God's truth (pp.219-220). Such poetry, when shaped in accordance with 'this branch of [ . . . ] art,' could produce stunning effects 'upon the human mind and heart,' comforting the sinful and penitent reader as it absolves the sinful and penitent poet (pp.221-222). While Keble admitted that few achieve such devotional poetry, it is notable that Rossetti's own verse corresponds to each of Keble's requirements as discussed above: it masks its author's profound intellectual grasp of its subject matter; it reveals a poet dignified in her command of devotional passion, refusing to exploit extremes of imagery; and it discloses one tormented by her unworthiness in the eyes of God, repenting as she writes and unwilling to swerve her style into anything more than 'noble simplicity.'

Rossetti's refusal to stray into any obvious originality adhered strictly to a Tractarian dislike for it, and does not reveal a poet curbed by religious language as some critics have suggested.<sup>29</sup> Like Keble, Rossetti believed the world analogous to heaven, a simple representation of God that its inhabitants must attempt to understand, writing in *Seek and Find*: 'Objects of sight may and should quicken us to apprehend objects of faith, things temporal suggesting things eternal. Our just and tender Lord Who accepts good will without regard to ability [see Cor.viii.12], stands ready to sanctify and utilize every sense and faculty we possess [see Rev.iii.20]. Natural gifts are laid as stepping-stones to supernatural [sic]' (p.180). Poetry provides Rossetti with such a stepping-stone in that it allows the unconditionally faithful believer to understand the natural world as evidence of God in much the same way as the Fathers, relying on analogy and typology as intellectual devices for interpretation.<sup>30</sup> Forever shrinking from pouring forth God's secrets, poetry lucidly praises God while holding back from him, exemplary in its mode of worship but always respectful of the sublime and complex power it vainly

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Stuart Curran's analysis of Rossetti's poetry, 'The Lyric Voice of Christina Rossetti,' *Victorian Poetry*, 9 (1971), 287-299; and Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *Religious Trends in English Poetry: Volume IV 1830-1880, Christianity and Romanticism in the Victorian Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), wherein it is argued that Rossetti's verse benefits from anthologization, a statement that ignores the context in which she was writing (p.309).

<sup>30</sup> Mary Arseneau, 'Incarnation and Interpretation: Christina Rossetti, the Oxford Movement, and "Goblin Market,"' *Victorian Poetry*, 31:1 (1993), 79-93 (p.82).

attempts to render. As a genre, then, poetry epitomized reserve for the Tractarians, and it was predominantly in this genre that Rossetti employed reserve, making accessible its detail and conveying her intimacy with Williams' pamphlet.

## II Rossetti Reads Reserve

Part II focuses on Rossetti's awareness and employment of reserve in her writing, arguing that she communicated such consciousness through two metaphors which both hide away or erase the believer: the chancel screen and images of whiteness. Composing poetry centred around either the screen or the colour white, Rossetti proved to initiated believers that she could write about God in a reserved way, while tempting uninformed readers to unravel that which she veiled, a task that demanded an intellectual engagement with religion. I turn to Rossetti's metaphorical presentation of reserve below, but first, establish some direct links between Williams' Tract and Rossetti's poetry. I argue that the poet followed Williams' five uses of reserve to emphasize tradition, the worthy believer, the intellect, revelation and the irreverence of 'popular,' and so unreserved, accounts of religion as outlined in 'On Reserve.' In doing this, I conceive of Rossetti as a Christian who self-consciously fashioned herself as a Tractarian, not only captivated by the mystery of High Church ritual, but fascinated by those doctrines and theological laws central specifically to the Oxford Movement.

Rossetti's poetry and prose accorded with Williams' descriptions of reserve, I argue, but refashioned and reinterpreted his often conservative arguments. For example, Williams' emphasis on traditional religion in 'On Reserve' is read by Rossetti as a call to all believers, men and women, to assume the identity of a cleric. Rossetti's prose most specifically presents its author as an established theologian, her first publication, *Annus Domini*, published by the same James Parker who had printed the *Tracts for the Times*. A conventional prayer book containing a collect for every day of the year, each

beginning with a scriptural text, the book was issued as one of Parker's shilling series. Rossetti thus joined such seventeenth-century divines as Lancelot Andrewes, John Cosin, Jeremy Taylor, and Thomas Ken also printed in the series, further establishing her connection with Laudian tradition.<sup>31</sup> Rossetti's series of short studies of the *Benedicite*, *Seek and Find*, followed a long poetical canticle listed in the *Book of Common Prayer*, as well as the form Williams' own versical harmonies adopted. *Called To Be Saints* is not only a hagiographic work, but a study in analogy and typology, published by S. P. C. K. in a traditional Tractarian design: bound in dark blue buckram, stamped in gold, and ornamentally engraved on antique white paper.<sup>32</sup> *Letter and Spirit* obliged the reader with a series of notes on the commandments, and *The Face of the Deep* performed a biblical commentary upon Revelation, seemingly indifferent to contemporary trends which read the Bible critically and historically. As I have already noted, Rossetti's poems too read like religious primers, and even that verse which appears 'secular' provides an oblique, indeed reserved, comment upon scripture.

Rossetti also adheres to Williams' theories concerning unbelievers, intimating that only the worthy, a group to which she strives to belong, should receive God's word. In 'Hark! the Alleluias' (V), for example, Rossetti implies that only those who treat religious matters with reserve will be saved on the last day:

Hark! the Alleluias of the great salvation  
 Still beginning, never ending, still begin,  
 The thunder of an endless adoration:  
 Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation  
 Which have kept the truth may enter in (ll.1-5)

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<sup>31</sup> David A. Kent and P. G. Stanwood, *Selected Prose of Christina Rossetti* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p.197.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, p.247.



Those who have 'kept the truth' back, revered God's secrets and voiced a prolific and powerful faith, will be kindly judged and granted salvation at the gates of heaven. The poem thus implies that the uniting factor of God's 'righteous nation' is a strict adherence to the rules of reserve. The believer ignorant of such rules, Rossetti argues, will find herself subject to a painful and arduous existence, striving to uncover a God incomprehensible to a mortal. 'A Pause of Thought' (*GMOP*), for example, portrays a narrator who longs for that which seems never to arrive: 'Sometimes I said: It is an empty name | I long for; to a name why should I give | The peace of all the days I have to live? | Yet gave it all the same' (ll.13-16). Recognizing herself to be a 'foolish one' in line seventeen, the narrator seems helpless in her patience, faith constructed as naïve and uninformed, and so shakeable. As she asserts in 'Till Tomorrow' (*P*), the believer who attempts to reach God's 'unattainable treasure' is doomed to fall into a craving that will leave her 'tired | Of longing and desire' (ll.1-2, 6).

The believer who craves for God, then, must compensate such failed desire by the attainment of religious knowledge, and Rossetti, again like Williams, eagerly presented the intellect as an important foundation for reserved faith. 'A Castle-Builder's World' (*V*), for example, declares that to neutralize ideation in faith reproduces the earth as an 'unprofitable space,' where the living are replaced by a spectral herd of believers who disguise thought behind grotesque vizards:

Living men and women are not found there,  
 Only masks in flocks and shoals;  
 Flesh-and-bloodless hazy masks surround there,  
 Ever wavering orbs and poles;  
 Flesh-and-bloodless vapid masks abound there,  
 Shades of bodies without souls (ll.5-10).

The striking mask imagery evokes a group of non-questioning devotees, a Dionysian hoi polloi, who do not desire even to realize that religious secrets are being hidden from them, never mind the content of the denied information. Their zombie-like acceptance of ignorance eats away their souls, and bodies emerge from this murky scene as mere silhouettes against the bleak realm pictured as nothing more than a 'space' (l.4). For the believer intent on grounding her faith in knowledge, however, the world is not simply a 'space' and instead becomes an arena of ideas and inspiration. One thus comes to occupy a scholarly role, allowing the subject to assume a position of some authority on earth while waiting to ultimately reach heaven.

Such authority was, in theory, open to women as well as men. Women were thus granted the power to pass on God's truths, and so raised to the level of the ordained minister. As Rossetti argued in her prose, women are 'Quicker-sighted in matters spiritual' than men, and so must have access to religious information and strive to pass it on; those "that hath ears to hear" are obliged to convey the 'message' to society, albeit in a strictly reserved manner (*LS*, p.57, *TF*, p.62). In *Time Flies*, Rossetti insists that women's 'duty of the moment is to write,' justifying women's religious writing as not only valid, but mandatory. The woman sceptical of her own scholarly worth is discarded and refused, as a question and answer passage from *Time Flies* portrays, played out between a believer plagued with feelings of unworthiness, and a figure reminding her of the infallible right to express one's faith. The latter's opening query, 'why do we not write?' is replied by the submissive believer: 'Because we cannot summon up anything original, or striking, or picturesque, or eloquent, or brilliant' (p.22). The inquisitor repels such a response, reminding her that God remains forever worthy of 'meditation' and 'exposition,' originality a false value in Tractarian poetics (p.22). Denying one's right to study God's truths is caused 'not by humility but pride,' the more confident speaker notes, reminding her doubting friend that 'Much good work has been hindered by such an anxiety to do better as deters one from promptly doing one's best' (p.22). It is vanity, then, and not social convention, that withholds women

from the path of intellectual inquiry, Rossetti suggests, asking God for ‘grace to study and meditate’ in *Annus Domini*, and thus encouraging her female readership to commence study immediately (Prayer 314).

Intellectual study was always religion-bound for Rossetti, marked by reserve and so expressed in an often overly subtle manner. Hence, when she states in *Letter and Spirit* that she feels ‘it a solemn thing to write conjectural sketches of Scripture,’ hoping ‘my mistakes will be forgiven me,’ Rossetti is not apologizing for intellectual inadequacy, but instead framing her thought within the boundaries of reserve (p.158). For one who always wished to occupy the lowest place, reserve was a liberating doctrine, underlining the scriptural contention that “‘Many that are first shall be last; and the last first [Mark 10.31],’” as Rossetti states in *Letter and Spirit* (p.57). She conceded that the burden of subordination was hard, but argued that it was bearable for women because of their strength. ‘Women are strongest,’ the poet remarks in *The Face of the Deep*, able to sustain their role as the left hand to men’s right-handed lead (p.358). While the left hand of the world has ‘little independence’ from the right, ‘more apt at carrying than executing,’ the two together create an ‘essential equality, inasmuch as all are Christ’s’ (pp.410, 501). Further, as the left-handed carrier of society, a guiding rather than a doing role, Rossetti casts women as educators looking to a time when ‘there may arise a left-handed society!’ in which religious education is paramount (p.410).

Like Williams, Rossetti looked towards a time when what is reserved on earth will be revealed in heaven, indicated by her constant yearning to achieve the ‘goal.’ The waiting process can be temporarily eased, however, by the acquisition of religious knowledge: that which can be grasped on earth helps to forestall the desire for those reserved truths which can only be understood in heaven. As she writes in her sonnet, ‘Ah Lord, Lord, if my heart were right with Thine’ (V):

then should I rest resigned



Awaiting knowledge with a quiet mind

Because of heavenly wisdom's anodyne (ll.1-4)

As an 'anodyne,' wisdom is fashioned as a healing power as well as a reward for patience, knowledge restorative and healthy, naturally leading to love, trust and hope (ll.7, 8, 9). The sonnet's concluding two lines firmly locate heaven as an eternal place where knowledge is always granted (ll.13-14). As Williams declared, 'knowledge which is supposed in morals to be the result of a good life, is something which is of a nature very great and infinite' ('On Reserve,' II:3, p.38). Only the believer who directly undertakes some sort of theological education may hope to become divinely acquainted with 'the deeper treasures of divine Wisdom' ('On Reserve,' I:10, p.28).

As I have suggested, the Tractarians considered that those who refused to contemplate God in an intellectual manner were impatient and irreverent individuals, undeserving of heaven. Where Williams expressed such a view in his attack on popular and Low Church religion, Rossetti poetically portrayed the consequences for those lacking a religious education. 'Winter: My Secret' (*GMOP*), for example, betrays the discomfort of a narrator unwilling to intellectually engage with, and at times believe in, the secrets of God. Many critics have discussed the 'secret' at the heart of this poem, but few associate it with God's truths even as they contend it lies at the core of poetry, as God does within Tractarian poetics, or render it a reservation of an unknown commodity. Angela Leighton, for example, suggests that the poem implies 'the idea of some inherent, unlockable meaning at the heart of poetry,' constructing a 'teasing strategy of "fun"' rather than a vindication of the unbeliever.<sup>33</sup> Isobel Armstrong's reading of the poem more insightfully notes its concern with 'secrecy and reserve, prohibition, taboo, revealing and concealing,' connecting to my argument that the poem brings up the issue of the believer barred from religious law.<sup>34</sup> For the poem seduces the

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<sup>33</sup> Angela Leighton, *Victorian Woman Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (New York and London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1992), p.158.

<sup>34</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, p.257.

reader with a hidden enigma figured as a freezing wind which blows aimlessly to reveal nothing: she who refuses to educate herself in Tractarian theology will find ‘no secret after all,’ Rossetti suggests (l.8). The narrator, ignorant and unprepared to learn, rashly assumes a ‘mask for warmth’ against the enigmatic winds that threaten to baffle her with their secrets (l.18). Aware that such knowledge will fall on deaf ears, the narrator playfully covers her lack of religious education with playful language. God’s secrets continue to ‘Come bounding and surrounding’ the narrator, however, ‘buffeting’ and ‘astounding’ her with codes that make no sense to one who refuses to work towards their revelation (ll.15-16). She thus halts the section with a plea to ‘leave that truth untested still,’ concluding a rapid and abrupt discussion of what is to be left secret and reserved (l.22).

‘A Castle-Builder’s World,’ however, aurally similar to ‘Winter: My Secret,’ but written almost thirty years later, reads in a more compressed and gradual manner, paralleling the narrative style of ‘On Reserve.’ Markedly slow and gradually peeling back the layers of an argument littered with suspending commas, both Williams’ diatribe and Rossetti’s poem force the reader to pause within a text already dense and difficult. Such a style puts into practice the doctrine of *reserve*, suspending the reader within esoteric devotional references, and implicitly encouraging her to obtain the knowledge necessary to decode the language and understand God more fully. The believer, then, must prepare herself for revelation by accumulating the religious knowledge necessary to decode that which other believers have reserved in commentaries, tracts and poems. One of the most obvious reminders of God’s reserved status confronted the believer in many Tractarian churches in the form of a chancel screen, which partly hid the altar from the laity. Rossetti employed the image of the screen in her poetry to underline the barrier between the mortal and God, following Williams in *The Cathedral*, and, once more, invoking her identity as a Tractarian thinker.

#### (i) Screening God

Rossetti would have encountered the chancel screen as it separated the altar from the chancel in Christ Church as a marker of Tractarianism's return to medieval architecture, as well as ceremony. A concrete sign of God's hidden position, the screen cut off the laity from the altar: the most sacred part of the church. The altar was both symbol of the heavenly throne and foundation of the Eucharist as George Herbert conceived in 'The Altar,' made of stone to reflect Christ and rendered by St Matthew as the cornerstone of Christianity (21. 42).<sup>35</sup> By delimiting the holy sanctuary containing the altar with a partition or grill, a practice that dates from the fourteenth century, the mystery of Christ was sheltered and provided a focal point for clergy and laity alike. Only myth asserts that the doors of the chancel screen cannot close, teaching that the way from earth, represented by the nave, to heaven, located in the chancel, remains forever open to the faithful and learned. It is more certain, however, that the screen purposefully encouraged the believer to try and penetrate what was being hidden from her through the procurement of religious knowledge. As Gregory Dix argues, the screen was not the same as the solid iconostasis of the Orthodox Church, which physically prevented the laity from seeing the consecration. While the Western screen signified a barrier, it expressly enabled the congregation to see the Eucharist ritual, luring the believer into 'discovering' God's mysteries, and Dix concedes the association of the screen with the idea of veiling a secret.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Paul marks the difference between pagans and Christians by claiming that only the latter have access to the Lord's table which has been given to them by way of Christ's example at the Last Supper; Christ's sacrifice provided both a model for the dedication of the Christian life, and the root of the term for altar, *thusiasterion* meaning 'place of sacrifice,' first used in the Septuagint. More commonly used by Christians was the word *trapeza* meaning table, and around 200 CE the altar became a stationary structure sanctified by a special anointment with oil. The Latin word *altare* was finally settled on by the Western church around the fourth century, signifying a single 'raised place' to mark it off from the pagan altar which was generally referred to in the plural; on Christ's significance as a 'cornerstone' see Rossetti's 'Lord, grant us eyes to see and ears to hear' (V), where Jerusalem itself 'is built | With walls of jasper and with streets of gold, | And Thou Thyself, Lord Christ, for Corner Stone' (ll.12-14).

<sup>36</sup> Dom Gregory Dix, 'The Veil and the Screen,' in *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1943), pp.480-482; also quoted in Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, p.254fn.6; as that which covers God, the screen also prefigured the customary veiling of crucifixes, statues and pictures during Lent, a tradition that dates to the tenth century wherein images of Christ's death were hidden due to the popular depiction of him on the cross as alive and victorious at this time; see, for example, the canopy erected by



Aymer Vallance dates the notion of the altar as that which should be guarded back to the ninth century, although the word 'screen' is a product of the Reformation, wherein Elizabeth I declared that chancel screens should be retained in the face of any architectural amendment.<sup>37</sup> Screens constructed after the Reformation were often destroyed in the nineteenth century as markers of Rome, and yet both supporters of the Gothic revival and Anglo-Catholicism continued to advocate and restore the screen, notably the Cambridge Camden Society which deemed it the 'most beautiful and Catholik appendage to a Church.'<sup>38</sup> The Society was in turn motivated by Pugin's *Treatise on Chancel Screens and Rood Lofts* (1851), one of his numerous Catholic revival publications lavishly detailing the decorative and architectural innovations of medieval Gothic and aesthetically popular with the Pre-Raphaelites, including Rossetti.

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Torrigiano over the altar of the chapel of Henry VII at Westminster in the sixteenth century; Nicholas Hawksmoor's canopy of 1727 in St Mary Woolnoth in London; and the nineteenth-century examples of Lincoln and Peterborough Cathedrals, both of which used the canopy to cover the High Altar; see Aymer Vallance, *English Church Screens: Being Great Roods Screenwork and Rood-Lofts of Parish Churches in England and Wales* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1936), pp.58-59, 62-63.

<sup>37</sup> Vallance, *English Church Screens*, p.31; the rood screen was so named because of its position underneath the Great Rood, that is, the balk of the cross to which the crucified figure of Christ is attached and was either suspended by chains from the roof, or balanced on a rood-beam embedded in the side walls and stretching across the church horizontally; the oldest screens were made of iron and later stone, although the Elizabethan Order of Council in 1561 precluded the use of both these materials in the production of screens, and hereafter many screens were constructed from wood; Henry VIII's injunctions of 1538 prohibited screens altogether, while Mary's ascension enforced the replacing of roods, complete with the Mary and John (figures of the Virgin and John the Evangelist) that accompanied the cross from the twelfth century, see Vallance, *English Church Screens*, p.5; Mary's reign was too short for everything to be restored, but Elizabeth's succession to the throne in 1558 favoured a church that combined a strong sense of Protestant theology with an anglicized semi-Catholic liturgy, and was therefore more sympathetic to the presence of the chancel screen and other religious imagery; the Bishop of Worcester remarked: 'The Queen's Majesty considered it not contrary to the word of God, nay, rather to the advantage of the Church, that the image of Christ crucified, together with Mary and John, should be placed heretofore in some conspicuous part of the church, where they might more readily be seen by all the people. Some of us (bishops) thought far otherwise, and more especially as all images of any kind were at our last Visitation not only taken down, but also burnt . . . and because the ignorant and superstitious multitude is in the habit of paying adoration to this kind of idol above all others.' Elizabeth was eventually forced to submit to her advisors, and by the summer of 1559, the use of religious images was rendered again illegal, yet the 1561 Order of Council clearly states that screens were to be retained. It declares that 'there remain a comely partition between the chancel and the church, that no alteration be otherwise attempted in them, but be suffered in quiet. And where no partition is standing, there to be one appointed,' Bishop of Worcester, letter to Peter Martyr, April 1560, in David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell ed., *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p.5, 10, 78, 86.

<sup>38</sup> Publication of the Cambridge Camden Society, *A Few Words to Church-Builders with an Appendix Containing Lists of Windows, Fonts and Rood Screens Intended to Serve as Models* (1842), in James F. White, *The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp.100-102.

For Pugin, the restoration of chancel screens was ‘not a mere question of architectural detail,’ but involved ‘great principles connected with discipline, and even faith,’ supported by those who ‘wish for the revival of ancient solemnity and reverence’ in Churches.<sup>39</sup> Invoking the screen as that which protects ‘the sacrifice of the Mass,’ it becomes a reminder that what lies beyond the altar must be revered with unlimited respect and awe through ceremony and prayer (*Screen*, p.3)

Pugin suggested that ‘Christians of the present time have little idea of the solemnity of the ancient worship of the Catholic church’ and that any sense of ritual veneration had ‘lamentably become destroyed in the latter times’ (p.7). Choirs and sanctuaries, Pugin argued, had always been ‘separated off’ from the rest of the church by ‘open screens and enclosures,’ and he stressed that ‘no church intended for Catholic worship was complete without them’ (pp.9, 13). Pugin’s emphasis on open screens correlates with Rossetti’s construction of God as an open secret, and both shun the idea of excluding the general laity from the sacraments: they must merely be reminded of the secrecy in which this religious knowledge is shrouded. As Pugin remarked, ‘closed screens are now only suited to conventual and collegiate churches,’ linking the screen to religious study and thought like Rossetti (p.13). Open screens too enhanced the meditative atmosphere of the church interior, having always existed, Pugin stated, in the ‘oldest churches, and, in succeeding centuries not only was every chancel and choir enclosed by them, but each chapel, and even altar’ (p.11). Hence, the open screen must be an ‘essential characteristic of Catholic reverence,’ both practically, to ‘prevent any irreverence or intrusion in the sacred places at those times when no celebration or office is going on,’ and symbolically, to ‘impress on the minds of the faithful the great sanctity of all connected with the sacrifice of the altar’ (p.12). Pugin considered opponents of screens to be ‘the enemies of Catholic traditions and practices,’ and significantly deemed them uneducated, attributing their views to an ‘extreme ignorance of ecclesiastical

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<sup>39</sup> Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *A Treatise on Chancel Screens and Rood Lofts: Their Antiquity, Use and Symbolic Signification* (London: Charles Dolman, 1851), p.1; further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text, and where necessary, signified by the title *Screens*.

traditions' (p.70). Like Rossetti and Williams, Pugin looked unfavourably upon any believer lacking an intellectual appreciation of the religious worship she practised.

Like Rossetti too, however, Pugin was keen to distinguish between the holy hierarchy the screen initiated, and the class hierarchy imposed by the pew-rent system, two very separate power-structures often confused by anti-Catholic critics of ritual. The screen was an appropriate symbol of the distinction between the clergy, who were allowed in the chancel, and the laity, who must stay in the nave. Pew rents designated seats according to how much the worshipper could pay, allocating the rich to furnished 'boxes' and the poor to uncomfortable and badly situated seats, a system deemed outdated and unchristian by the Oxford Movement. For Rossetti, the system not only instigated unchristian prejudice within the church, but drew attention away from the screen as a sacred and ritual sign of human isolation from God. She openly denounced pew-rents in her short story, 'Pros and Cons' (1867), partly in support of Reverend Henry William Burrows' campaign against them at Christ Church, where he presided in the 1860s, and partly to express the standard Tractarian line.<sup>40</sup>

'Pros and Cons' creates a scene wherein several members of a fictional laity are taking tea in the drawing room with their local Rector, Dr Goodman, as he attempts to convince them of the corruption and immorality of pew rents. He contends: "if our adorable Lord [ . . . ] had gone into our parish church last Sunday [ . . . ] He would certainly not have waited long to be ushered into a pew, but would, at least as willingly, have sat down amongst His own 'blessed' poor'" ('Pros and Cons,' pp.113-114). The shallow Mrs Plume, whose very name implies pride and conceit, refuses to respond to the Rector, turning instead 'to her hostess' and observing: "Ah, dear Mrs Goodman, we know and revere the zeal of our dear good apostle. But you and I are old housekeepers [ . . . ] and we know that the poor are not nice neighbours; quite infectious, in fact. They do very well together all in a clump, but one really couldn't risk sitting amongst them,

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<sup>40</sup> 'Pros and Cons' was first published in *Churchman's Shilling Magazine*, I (1867), 496-500 under the original title of 'Some Pros and Cons about Pews'; and then in Christina Rossetti, *Commonplace, and*



on various grounds, you know' (p.114). The obdurate Mr Stone also rejects the Rector's proposals, declaring that while 'the tendency of the day is to level social distinctions and to elevate unduly the lower orders [i]n this parish at least let us combine to keep up wise barriers between class and class, and to maintain that fundamental principle practically bowed to all over our happy England, that what you can pay for you can purchase' (p.115-116). Mr Stone is thus indicative of the unthinking Christian as he scrambles to be first in church and in front of God, instead of recognizing his true unworthiness. As Pugin ascetically argued, 'instead of striving for front seats and first places' the laity should 'hardly feel worthy to occupy the remotest corner of the temple' (*Screens*, pp.7-8).

Contrary to the pew-rent system, the screen served to level the laity as a group all equally distanced from the altar, its function within the church equivalent to the poetical function reserve offered, both shielding God and his mysteries away from the unworthy subject.<sup>41</sup> As a visual symbol, the chancel screen was a more palpable image for literary readers than that of reserve, familiar with the employment of church architecture as a way of structuring narrative religious poems.<sup>42</sup> Williams used the church to structure *The Cathedral* and prefaced his poetical sequence with references to Herbert's *The Temple* (1633), 'where moral and sacred Lessons' are attached to church architecture, and Wordsworth's *The Excursion* (1814), 'being arranged as the parts of a Gothic

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*Other Short Stories* (London: Macmillan, 1870); my references to the story are from Kent and Stanwood's reprint of the story in *Selected Prose*, pp.112-116 and appear in the text.

<sup>41</sup> It is worth noting that screens were rarely included in newly built churches, disliked by congregations determined to both see and hear services. The symbol of the screen, however, was valued highly by many Tractarian writers, including Rossetti, Pusey, Williams and Pugin.

<sup>42</sup> Although Rossetti chose not to use the structure of the church to map out a poetical sequence, she is deeply receptive to Herbert's style, and yet is predictably denounced by T. S. Eliot as owning a 'narrower range of emotion and an inferior intellectual gift' than the metaphysical poet, despite her intricate presentation of a very similar religious philosophy, in T.S. Eliot, 'George Herbert,' *Spectator*, 148 (1932), in Diane D'Amico, 'Reading and Rereading George Herbert and Christina Rossetti,' *John Donne Journal*, 4:2 (1985), 269-289 (p.270); several critics recognize the similarities between Herbert and Rossetti, however; D'Amico argues that Rossetti's arrangement of *Verses* in increasing thematic significance echoes Herbert's *Temple*, his poetical rhetoric granting her a form through which to express spirituality, 'George Herbert and Christina Rossetti,' p.285; and Fredegond Shove suggests that Rossetti is very like 'George Herbert in her conversations with the Lord,' *Christina Rossetti* (1931), in Edna Kotin Charles, *Christina Rossetti: Critical Perspectives 1862-1982* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press; London: Associated University Presses, c.1985), p.104.

Church' (*Cathedral*, p.v).<sup>43</sup> Williams affixed a brief description of the screen at the back of his collection, linking it to the *Disciplina Arcani*, a method of reserve noted in chapter four. The *Disciplina* ruled that all truths and mysteries of the Faith had to be held back until the catechumens (those undergoing preparatory instruction prior to Baptism) had become deserving enough to receive them, and while ostensibly acting as a cloak in times of religious persecution, signalled one's respect for religious secrets.<sup>44</sup> As Williams remarked: 'The *Disciplina Arcani*, which is made to stand for the Skreen [withdraws] from public view the Sacraments and higher mysteries of our Religion' (*Cathedral*, p.305). While its observance was 'founded on a reverence for the sacred mysteries themselves' it was also 'to the advantage of those who were thus excluded,' protecting the unprepared from the overwhelming, yet devastating, truths of God (p.306).

Confronted by the chancel screen, Rossetti proposes, then, the believer is reminded of her distance from God and the reserved contemplative state in which she resides. As reserve allows Rossetti the poet to vocalize the secrets of her faith, the screen allows Rossetti the worshipper to render the atmosphere of the church as a silent study space. The screen divides the believer from God by taking several forms in her verse – a trellis, band of smoke, wall of fire or delicate veil. In 'Whitsun Eve' (*UP*), for example, Christ is 'Screened by a tender mist' heavy with 'incense' to imitate the atmosphere of a medieval church (ll.3-4, 10). Believers must try and breathe this incense in as a way of collapsing the screen and yet the poem warns of doing so prematurely, inciting all to wait patiently until called. Such patience profoundly tests the believer's will, as Rossetti concedes in the sonnet, 'A Discovery' (*UP*), in which two narrators, one secure in heaven and the other restlessly striving to gain such a place, debate the latter's frustration. While the second narrator asserts that she is "seeking

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<sup>43</sup> Williams stated: 'Hints of [the publication] may be gained from Herbert's "Temple," where he attaches moral and sacred Lessons to the "Church Windows" and "Church floor." And it has been suggested by the author of "the Excursion," in his Preface to that work, that his Poems might be considered as capable of being arranged as the parts of a Gothic Church, of which the minor Pieces might be "likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses,"' in 'Advertisement,' *The Cathedral*, p.v.

still’’ for heaven’s rewards, the reader is taught that ‘Heaven alone is found unsought,’ only endowed upon a believer by God (ll.1-4). The first narrator reminds her troubled friend that she must “‘chase no more this shifting empty show’’ that comprises heaven’s impenetrable guise, and yet the second narrator confesses that she is still “‘spending for that thing which is not bought,’’ furthering her entrapment within futile worldliness and materialism (ll.6, 5). She longs to be elevated to the first narrator’s position, “‘Screened from the weary world’s loud discontent’’ and safe in a “‘home above’’ that has been secured through faith (ll.10-11).

The patient and faithful believer, then, is granted a place behind the chancel screen with God, while the impetuous and over-eager believer is hurled into a checkmate, desiring to reach heaven but detained at the point of entry until ready. It is as if she is caught in the bars of the screen, unable to push through because tempted back to earthly luxuries and needs. The faithful believer, however, is able to dispatch her passionate love for God through the screen before her ultimate arrival in heaven, securing a place in defiance of all barriers. Rossetti portrays this process vividly in sonnet 24 of ‘*Later Life*’ (*P*):

The wise do send their hearts before them to  
 Dear blessed Heaven, despite the veil between;  
 The foolish nurse their hearts within the screen  
 Of this familiar world, where all we do  
 Or have is old, for there is nothing new: (ll.1-5).

As the foolish attempt to penetrate the barrier demarcating them from heaven, they become caught ‘within’ it, the screen’s trellised structure snaring them like a web, halting the unprepared from the mysteries of God, and forcing them to remain in a space inducive of study (l.3). This maze-like trap signifies the complexities of a world that

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<sup>44</sup> Jones, *Isaac Williams*, p.31.



seems 'familiar' but is littered with distractions luring the believer from God into a decayed and antiquated existence wherein everything is 'old' (ll.4-5). There is 'nothing new,' of course, because God's glory 'antedates what else hath been,' and yet that which lies behind the screen is unknown and unequalled, beyond imagination but rooted in the origins of the world (ll.5, 7).

Rossetti explains in 'Earth has clear call of daily bells' (V) that this world, restrained behind a screen-like veil, acts as a kind of chamber in which the believer must wait until Paradise 'accords the chimes' which signal her entry into heaven (l.7). This chamber is rendered as a 'chancel vault of gloom and star,' intimating that every believer must make a choice between misery and joy while located within the chancel-space containing the altar and screen. Only those who choose faith may harmonize a world so 'out of tune,' however, aware of the divine vibrations that flash through the air, hinting at what is to come (ll.11-12). Breaking through heaven's protective barrier requires a passionate expression of faith that resembles a penetrating fire to smash through the screen, refusing to quench the spirit as St Paul instructs (I Thessalonians 5.19).<sup>45</sup> For Rossetti, it is the heart that keeps alight one's faith, described as an altar in *Seek and Find* at which the believer must pray, and inferring that the body stands as the screen around this inner shrine (p.207). Once the believer has broken through the physicality of her body in death, thus privileging the mind as that which must think about God, the soul and heart are disengaged and are free to move through the screen and into heaven. Such a heated force lies within us all according to Rossetti, who writes in 'Advent' (V) that beneath the earth's deep 'crust of cold' lies 'fire unfelt, unseen,' waiting to be inflamed by human faith (ll.2-3). The believer must hide between the cradling 'inner swathings' of earth until she may enter heaven, and yet anxiety closes the poem, the narrator demanding: 'When will fire break up [earth's] screen? | When will life burst thro' her mould? (ll.8-9).

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<sup>45</sup> Fire, Rossetti declared, is 'God's gift to man,' that which Moses and Aaron kindled at the sacrifice in the Mosaic Tabernacle and were instructed to keep alight as a testament to God's authority (Leviticus 9.24), in *Seek and Find*, p.85.

These questions express impatience rather than a lack of faith, and Rossetti invokes the believer to strive towards studying and so unravelling God's secrets, even if she comprehends such solutions lie only in heaven. Fire ideally penetrates the screen because it helps light up the path to heaven, and thus the believer must concentrate on keeping the spark of her faith alive by educating herself in religious matters and praying always within church. As Rossetti states in *The Face of the Deep*: 'To meditate on the altar which we know, seems one safe way of meditating on the altar which we know not' (p.244). Williams, however, concentrates less on the believer's ability to break the screen and more on her blindness before God, who is cloaked from her by clouds of darkness to hide 'His dread sublimity' ('The Skreen,' *Cathedral*, l.15). For Williams, only 'Death draws aside the screen,' collapsing mortal life into an eternal vitality illuminated by God's own fiery presence which burns so that 'we pass the inevitable screen' ('The Athanasian Creed,' *Cathedral*, ll.17, 32-33). God's sublimity in these two poems mirrors Burke's notion of it as that which holds a 'powerful dominion over the passions,' and Williams' believer is manipulated and willed by God to remain in ignorance of him until called (*Inquiry*, p.54). Where Williams attributes the enlightening fire of heaven to God, Rossetti urges the believer to kindle it within herself through prayer, deriving igniting embers from the incense-filled smoke that drifts from Christ's own body and blood, that 'Burnt Offering' of the communion (*FD*, p.245). Through this sacrament, Christ 'receives us and our petitions into the "secret place" of [the Real] Presence and sets us in heavenly places with His own Self,' as the screen is finally disintegrated (*FD*, p.245).

The communion prayer, then, forges a portal through the chancel screen and provides a ticket into heaven, a private and intimate communication with God which goes some way to unveiling his mysteries. While Rossetti pushes her believer into such unveiling, she is careful to stress that she must remain covered herself, writing in 'St Michael and All Angels' (V) that 'We laud and magnify our God Almighty' by 'veil[ing] our faces' in prayer (ll.19-20). Like the Catholic and Tractarian priest who

covers his hands, the chalice and ciborium with liturgical cloths as a mark of reverence to God, Rossetti's believer must veil her body to convey her understanding of the ritual secrecy in which her faith exists. 'Which verse of the Holy Bible may not veil a mystery,' Rossetti reminds us in *The Face of the Deep*, stating that: 'Truth confronts us veiled, not in order to baffle us, but rather that our zeal may be redoubled to discern her' (pp.92, 249). Like the blessed virgin, whom 'the good providence of God has veiled' from 'our curiosity' to increase our reverence for her, God's truth should be always held back to secure the respect of which it is worthy (CTBS, p.136). Rossetti prays that God will 'Remove the veil' from the believer and 'illuminate them in the knowledge of thee' to educate those as yet unprepared to anticipate their final absolution (Prayer 270).

The veil, like the open screen, lures the believer into venturing a strained look through it to what lies on the other side, revealing just enough to keep the believer's faith and inquiry engaged. An unprepared peek can have disastrous consequences as Rossetti declares in 'Joy is but sorrow' (V), as 'Joy with lifted veil | Shows a face as pale | As the fair changing moon so fair and frail' (ll.5-7). Turned pale by the effrontery of an unworthy snoop, Christ warns the believer away from him but appears like a moon that has been clouded over, shrouded rather than hidden from view. Luminous behind the night-sky, Christ impels the believer to review her faith and return prepared, reminding her in 'Dost Thou Not Care' (PP) that he loves her in heaven or on earth, 'here or there,' but remains always 'veiled within [ . . . ] glory' (l.3). The gauze-like mantle of the veil invites the believer to glimpse God and take comfort, as Rossetti declares in sonnet 11 of 'Later Life,' Christ's 'glories half unveiled' offering the believer a focus 'whereon to set | Our hearts of hearts and eyes of our desire' (ll.8-9). Enticed 'upward' from 'this world of mire,' the believer must remove herself from what she has learned in mortal life to enter a paradise where everything is literally and symbolically heightened (l.11). Like the student who must learn one body of knowledge only to remove herself from it in an encounter with more complex ideas, the believer



must be intellectually secure in her religious learning in order to fully understand what she is presented with in heaven.

## (ii) Whiteness and Winter

The problem of getting to heaven, however, is difficult for the believer to tackle, unable to presume a place there but enduring concentrated religious study in mortal life simply to achieve a paradisiacal future. Heavenly prospects may be increased by intense spiritual preparation and intellectual endeavour, but the believer must also present herself before God in a manner which somehow emphasizes her extreme patience and quietly reserved faith. This is achieved, Rossetti suggests, by becoming spiritually immaculate, uncontaminated by a decaying and increasingly sinful world, and suitably pure to enter heaven's gleaming environment. By erasing and effacing her narrative voice, Rossetti suggests that it merges with the discourse in which it speaks, thus privileging Tractarian theology, and thus Christianity, over the self. Such a voice may seem too cautious, docile and laboriously holy without the context of reserve, as the example of "A Helpmeet for Him" (*P*, 1888) demonstrates. Presenting woman as man's 'shadow by day, his moon by night,' Rossetti appears to subordinate the female to the male, intimating that any strength she might have is veiled by 'Meek compliances' (l.6). While this inversely stresses that 'woman' in fact owns an important strength, it also prefigures her representation as 'World-wide champion of truth and right' in the third verse, deemed 'ruddy and white' to convey her spiritual health and pure white bearing (ll.8, 10). Cast as she is in man's vainglorious shadow, woman remains reserved, held back and shrouded until Judgement Day, angelic and pristine in her white guise, but intellectually more tuned in to the correct procedure for gaining entrance to heaven.

Whiteness, then, signifies both reserve and the believer's adherence to this doctrine, consequently heralding her arrival in heaven.<sup>46</sup> For whiteness, portrayed by Rossetti through images of purity and cleanliness, notably that of winter, snow and ice, prefigures heaven's own dazzling beauty. Whiteness is central to Rossetti, then, for three reasons: first, it metaphorically figures reserve, bleaching the believer before God; second, it creates a realm of clarity and meditation in which the believer can think; and third, it signals the white light associated with Christ and paradise. Winter too evokes heaven, the last season of the year and welcoming death, an era of expectancy halted only by the coming of spring. As a result, spring is disdained by Rossetti, as in 'A Birthday,' ironically deemed a time of decay as colour and growth burst through the snow, destroying the serene blanket of whiteness that conceals God's landscape. The icy frost of winter, like all images of whiteness in Rossetti's verse and prose, conveys fervent faith, fashioning the believer as an alabaster statue frozen into a fixed, unwavering belief in God. I explore here, then, Rossetti's obsession with whiteness on earth and in heaven as a marker, like the chancel screen, of her adherence to reserve.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> It is of note that white is associated with particular seasonal fasts and feasts in the church year: Christmas-Epiphany; Easter; Trinity; Blessed Virgin Mary; Saints other than martyrs; Baptisms/Confirmation; Ordination/Marriage; Dedication of a Church.

<sup>47</sup> It is clear, however, that one might read the poet's presentation of the pure Christian and gleaming heaven as racially constructed notions. While I believe Rossetti's object in elevating whiteness was grounded in her belief that equilibrium for all is achieved in heaven, the racial implications of the subject are beyond the scope of a chapter concerned primarily with a theological doctrine; for poems by Rossetti which deal more directly with issues of race and colonial power, see, for example, 'The Round Tower at Jhansi, June 8 1857' (*GMOP*) and 'Goblin Market' (*GMOP*); Jan Marsh offers an interesting context for the first of these poems, in 'The Indian Mutiny and Christina Rossetti's First Appearance in *Once a Week*,' *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, New Series, 1:1 (1992), 16-19; for a series of dynamic readings of race in Victorian literature, see Cora Kaplan, 'Black Figures/English Landscape,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27:2 (1999), 501-505; 'Black Heroes/White Writers: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Literary Imagination,' *History Workshop Journal*, 46 (1998), 30-62; and "'A Heterogeneous Thing': Female Childhood and the Rise of Racial Thinking in Victorian Britain,' in *Human, All Too Human*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 169-202; Kaplan's paper, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Black and White Sublime,' University of Warwick, Autumn, 1995, highlights Barrett Browning's allusion to a notably black Christ in her poem, 'Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point,' *Poems* (1850). The poem records the narrative of a black slave-narrator, who tells of her rape by a pilgrim who impregnates her with a child born white. The child, deemed 'far too white, too white for me' by the increasingly repelled mother, invokes in her a feeling of extreme disgust and terror Kaplan understands as the white sublime (l.116). Unable to even gaze upon her child with his 'master's look,' she suffocates him until his body stiffens and freezes (ll.144-5, 152). The sublime horror of the child's white skin only subsides as he is darkened within the 'black earth' of his grave, softening the mother toward him as she begins to feel strangely reunited with his ghostly spectre (l.185). Notably, the narrator stresses that the 'fine white

For Rossetti, whiteness remained exemplary of religious purity, and Christ, she believed, provided the believer with a representation of perfected whiteness, as conveyed in 'Feast of the Annunciation' (V). Here, the poet states that 'Christ alone is white,' measuring even the 'Blessed Virgin Mary' as shaded with a lily tone against Christ's dazzling hue (ll.1-3). Deeming Christ alone in his whiteness serves, not only to elevate him above the rest of creation as a unique phenomenon, but to highlight the significance of the colour white as that which indicates all that is divine. The most 'celestial' of colours, white tinges doves, lambs, snowdrops, roses, swans, clouds, pearls, diamonds and light itself, all biblical metaphors for purity, innocence and Christ-like goodness (*FD*, pp.98-99). Even the Apostles noted the 'effulgent raiment of Christ "exceeding white as snow,"' as Rossetti reminds us in *Seek and Find* (p.222; Mark 9.3). Thus Christ, through his whiteness, illustrates reserve, both colour and doctrine indicative of blankness and substance: there is seemingly nothing there until one learns what to look for. While God's secrets are undeniably everywhere around the believer, but cannot be grasped or revealed until Judgement Day, so white is like a brightness that glares at the viewer but cannot be touched or uncovered in its shimmering invisibility. As Rossetti states in *The Face of the Deep*: 'At the first moment *whiteness* does not suggest *colour*: yet all colour being latent in it, we finally discern in its train every lovely hue and gradation of hues' (p.99). Like God, whiteness is 'not an absence but rather a compendium of colour,' all tints eventually resolving 'themselves into whiteness' and 'capable of being re-developed from whiteness,' as the believer is born from and returns to her divine source (p.99).

Rossetti's compulsive repetition of white and whiteness in her poetry bleaches her poetical self to a point of profound submission before God, reserving her faith and

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angels' whisk away the 'white child's spirit' soon after his death, indicating her painful awareness that, in her world, God favours the white subject (ll.157, 163). Yet it is the black slave body that mirrors the wounded Christ, declares the narrator, reminding us that 'white men | Are, after all, not gods indeed, | Nor able to make Christs again' in an intense condemnation of the elevated status of white over black (ll.238-241).



linking her with the silvery saints and spirits so familiar in Catholic iconography.<sup>48</sup> As I noted in chapter four, Rossetti rendered the saints as a group able to teach and interpret God's word, and were thus worthy of aspiring towards for the intellectual poet. The ghostly characters of 'Old and New Year Ditties 2' (*GMOP*), for example, form an elite group of which the narrator longs to be a part, their job counting the last minutes of the old year in expectation of a new religious dawning, parading around this final night as 'blessed spirits, who delight | All thro' the holy night to walk in white' (ll.7-8). To walk in white is to walk alongside Christ himself, the believer illuminated by the dazzling glare that issues from him and cleanses all her sins. Humanity must work hard to achieve such a pure status, however, as Rossetti makes clear in 'Exultate Deo' (V), triumphed over by nature which easily secures a favourable place because of its inherent purity. The scent of flowers, innocence of lambs and clarity of bird song forges a world in which whiteness becomes a strangely tangible entity, 'Perfume and song and whiteness offering praise | In humble, peaceful ways (ll.1-2; emphasis mine). Lacking the inherent whiteness of nature, humanity must use life itself as a space in which to rise towards God through prayer, 'Fire unto fire, | Deep unto deep responsive, height to height, | Until he walk in white' (ll.10-12). Like the spirits of the previous poem, humanity is able to walk in white here, accepted into heaven and so given the white glow of the saved. While such whiteness cannot be achieved until the believer reaches heaven, God, Rossetti promises, presents true believers a glimpse of this glory in the meditative and serene silence of dreams, wherein 'robes are white' and 'all things lovely,' a portent of what is to come ('Man's life is but a working day' [V], ll.6, 8).

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<sup>48</sup> Rossetti's compulsion with repeating themes over and over has been widely addressed; see, for example, Nadean Bishop, 'Sacred Frenzies'; Paula Marantz Cohen, 'Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market": A Paradigm for Nineteenth-Century Anorexia Nervosa,' *University of Hartford Studies in Literature: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism*, 17:1 (1985), 1-18; Albert D. Hutter, 'Poetry in Psychoanalysis: Hopkins, Rossetti, Winnicott,' *The International Review of Psychoanalysis*, 9 (1982), 303-316; Helena Michie, 'The Battle for Sisterhood: Christina Rossetti's Strategies for Control in Her Sister Poems,' *The Pre-Raphaelite Review*, 3:2 (1983), 38-55, and, "'There is No Friend Like a Sister': Sisterhood as Sexual Difference,' *English Literary History*, 56:1 (1989), 401-421; Deborah Ann Thompson, 'Anorexia as a Lived Trope: Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market,"' *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 24:3-4 (1991), 89-106.

Heaven, then, offers the believer an enduring atmosphere of white light and glittering landscapes. The working day and restful evening seem to merge within such a realm, heaven's whiteness intimating that all is complete, flawless and perpetual. As Rossetti writes in "The Holy City, New Jerusalem" (V):

Jerusalem is built of gold,  
 Of crystal, pearl and gem:  
 Oh fair thy lustres manifold,  
 Thou fair Jerusalem!  
 Thy citizens who walk in white  
 Have nought to do with day or night,  
 And drink the river of delight (ll.1-7).

Golden and jewel-laden, Jerusalem dazzles its onlookers with a bright whiteness, its surroundings purified and purged of any evil, the citizens at last liberated to wear white robes and walk in white through their new-found Eden. Cleansed by the running 'river of delight' that provides the city with life, believers come to resemble each other within an immaculate condition of orderliness and purity, achieving an equality of being with saints and redeemed sinners alike. As Rossetti prays in *Annus Domini*: 'Cast out of us all that offendeth the Presence of Thy Purity' and 'out of the unclean bring the clean thing in us,' reducing humanity to a uniformity wherein all are equal before God (p.29). Cleansed of all wrongs, guilt, shame and frailty, the believer enters heaven protected by a kind of invisible shawl that erases all individuality along with sin. Purity will one day be attained just as God's mystery will be at last revealed to the religiously educated, Rossetti suggests, and mortals must wait like those Jerusalem citizens who have not quite reached this utopic apex, lingering in a less luminous realm and waiting for their promotion into the golden city.

Denied the guise of whiteness in mortal life, then, Rossetti searches for naturally white images as if they form a chainlike connection to God and the contemplative realm of heaven, endowing a kind of second-hand blessing upon their observer. The abundantly white fields and ivory harvest moon in “‘When my heart is vexed I will complain’” (V), for example, appear to the sickened narrator as a sign of ‘good cheer,’ symbolically communicating what awaits her in heaven (ll.1-5). Her foolish refusal of such imagery leaves her miserable until the Last Day, signified by the setting sun in line twenty-five, a failure that attenuates her mortal misery where spiritual comfort could have been found. Such comfort is instead sought for in ‘Where shall I find a white rose blowing’ (V), the narrator wandering into her garden where she believes ‘all sweets be’ hoping to see a white rose waving in the wind representing purity and thus God. Rossetti’s portrayal of the rose here, like her other invocations of plants and flowers, is executed with an unusual precision, removing them from the emblematic tendencies of common Victorian flower-verse and toward a deeper devotional meaning.<sup>49</sup> Equally, Rossetti’s overall invocation of nature is fundamentally, but necessarily obliquely, theological: because nature represents God’s presence within the world it must be reserved and hidden away until humanity is ready to observe its true divine meaning.

Thus the rose is made imperceptible to the human eye both through its albescent colour and its submersion beneath several layers of snow, a central image of whiteness for Rossetti, and here mentioned four times in the first verse alone as it flurries over the narrator and her garden. Such wintry weather freezes the believer on earth, however, until she is redeemed by the shining whiteness of heaven that awaits all believers and which remains humanity’s only valid alternative to a cold and frosty world. As the narrator notes: ‘No more winter and no more sorrow | Tomorrow,’ indicating that a

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<sup>49</sup> Gisela Hönnighausen, ‘Emblematic Tendencies in the Works of Christina Rossetti,’ *Victorian Poetry*, 10:1 (1972), 1-15 (pp.3-5, 14); Hönnighausen argues that Rossetti’s scientific precision in her descriptions of nature accord with a Pre-Raphaelite concern to record detail, turning away from a nineteenth-century preoccupation with emblematic technique as might be found in *Sacred Emblems with Misc. Pieces, Moral, Religious and Devotional in Verse* (1828) or the *Victorian Flower Sermons Series*, in which flowers were remarked upon in tract-like commentaries.



redemptive season change will arrive in the post-mortality 'tomorrow' space of paradise (ll.23-24).

A substitute for the real whiteness of heaven, winter snow teases the mortal believer into believing she can touch and dissolve whiteness to reach whatever is underneath, uncovering Christ along with his mysteries and revelations. The sacred whiteness of God cannot be encountered until the appropriately prepared believer enters heaven, of course, and snow provides Rossetti with a useful metaphor through which to communicate the reserved nature of holy revelation. As reserve withdraws the believer's faith from unbelieving eyes, maintaining a religious sense of mystery to invite the ignorant in, snow covers everything from view but animates its onlooker with a beautiful, shimmering spectacle. As reserve promises eventual disclosure by the very fact it is hiding something, so snow is guaranteed to melt when the seasons turn, promising an exposé of the natural world at its peak in spring. However, there is an important distinction to be made between revelation in heaven and the uncovering of a blossoming world, the latter serving only to defer revelation. Terminating the year in a state of glacial inertia to signal the close of mortality and the beginning of life in paradise, winter appears as the most positive of all seasons for Rossetti, who stated in *The Face of the Deep*: 'Spring or summer might satisfy a light heart, if only they could abide. Autumn is a very parable of passing away and sorrowfulness. Only winter is cheered by our foresight of its coming to an end; winter the death of each year' (p.300).

Signifying death and closure, winter provides Rossetti with the ideal metaphor to communicate the end of mortal life and the beginning of heavenly existence. As the narrator of 'Whitsun Tuesday' (V) notes: only when God signals that "'Winter is past and gone'" to the believer can he intimate that the time is right for her to "'Come hither, sit with Me upon My Throne'" and so enter heaven (ll.12, 14). Ephemeral and fleeting, the seasons serve to remind the believer that time on earth merely prefigures her heavenly life and Rossetti stresses that they must always 'pass' and 'end,' eventually fading completely 'in the better world which is to come' (*SF*, pp.55-56). While all that

is mortal fades and melts away, religious faith remains forever intact and permanent, on earth and in heaven, providing the ultimate transitional aid between the two realms. As Rossetti states in 'Short is time, and only time is bleak' (V), earthly reality is bound to 'shorten[ ] with the wintry rime,' ice and frost used here to communicate the speed with which the seasons alternate, change and eventually decline. The phrase 'wintry *rime*' has a second meaning too, betraying Rossetti's own rigid and frozen poetry, with its immaculate phrasing and rigid rhyme-schemes, as well as the frost which is formed from cloud or fog and literally covers everything around it. Rime bustles time along as it spreads a thick veil over the world, provoking the believer into a reserved state wherein she longs for knowledge and revelation. Yet, as 'Ice and snow are figures to us of evanescence, of that which passes away,' so human ignorance will vanish and intellect be privileged, Rossetti intimates, cleansed by the icy 'intensity of refreshment beyond the refreshing virtue of mere water' (pp.221-222).

Commonly a time of death and inertia, winter and its icy conditions come to initiate a kind of religious wake-up call, jolting the believer into a thoughtful and so responsible Christian faith. As Rossetti reminds us in a quotation from Ecclesiastes 3:1, there is a time for all things and 'to everything [ . . . ] a season,' stressing that all earthly conditions, even the freezing winter weather, replicate and mirror heaven and the rewards to be found there (*SF*, p.56). Rossetti's most clear-cut analysis of winter, ice and snow, appears in *Seek and Find's* 'Creation' section, the first half of the 'Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite,' in which all aspects of God's genesis are praised as monuments to his greatness.<sup>50</sup> Each theme is addressed under its own heading, constructing winter weather as the complete package for maintaining one's faith, that which, as noted above, shuttles the believer from earth into paradise. First, winter is propounded as the season which heralds the prospect of heaven, accommodating Christ's birth and so always 'abound[ing] in hope,' ushering in the new world (pp.213, 56). Winter further serves to test the believer, encouraging faith by

producing a sparkling and sublime snowy landscape affirming God's power, but also pinching at her resolve through icy blasts; as Rossetti states, recalling 'Winter: My Secret': 'Winter which nips can also brace' (p.56).

Second, frost is evoked as evidential of God's glorious creation, showering the world with 'a crust of silver which converts each veined leaf and spider's web into a noticeable wonder of intricate beauty, and which clothes the bare season with its own exclusive robe of honour' (*SF*, pp.57-58). While earth's details are magical enough without such icy illumination (such 'charm appears, in a sense, gratuitous' Rossetti adds), frost also freezes its onlooker into a seductive scene leaving her numb and shivering. For Rossetti, such discomfort provides a 'salutary pain' and force of 'ennobling discipline,' moulding the believer into an austere ice-maiden who will obey God's law with a singular and inflexible accuracy. Yet this 'bracing discipline' also cheers the believer 'under the first assault of [winter's] rigour', instilling her with a keen feeling of endurance she must get used to in her mortal life of devotional preparation and study. Thus, when milder climates come, the believer is reminded of the chilly climate of frosty times, recollecting her duty to God as instructed by frost's Coleridgean 'secret ministry' ('Frost at Midnight,' ll.1). She is thus strung up like a silent icicle 'quietly shining,' as Coleridge writes, for God with a desperate hope of pleasing him (ll.72-74). Like Coleridge, Rossetti conjures frost as a peaceful yet perturbing image that offers the believer, in the same way as Coleridge's sleeping infant, a vivid expression of the world in both its beauty and consternation.

Combining the beautiful with the sublime, frost is able to keep the believer in a state of feverish anticipation, gazing lovingly on God's creation as she is overwhelmed by his immense power over her environment and actions. Such a feeling is not enthusiastic, as in Brontë's poetry, however, but serene and thus welcomed as an portent of what is to come. God's white and sublime heaven, Rossetti declares, mercifully contradicts the dark, cruel and intolerable mortal realm of earth. Here, inhabitants suffer

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<sup>50</sup> See pp.55-68 'Creation'; and also pp.210-224 of 'Redemption' for an interesting, but less explicit



a vain and miserable existence until their prayers are answered and they are released into the fully democratic sphere of heaven. The hollowness of human life is conveyed in the third of Rossetti's icy benedictine themes, the cold, deemed 'on the whole' representative of 'defect, inferiority' and twinned always with death and darkness, rather than life and enlightenment (*SF*, p.60). Embittering all that dwell within its icy temperature, the cold can drain the believer of strength and will power, reducing her to the point of insignificance; as Rossetti states: 'Extreme cold dwarfs the human race' (p.62). Yet by denigrating the believer to the lowest of all levels, the cold brings her closer to God, for 'to be inferior once is not of necessity to be inferior always or finally: "Many that are first shall be last; and the last first" [Mark 10. 31],' Rossetti stresses (p.63). Those who are delivered into heaven earn their place by understanding the icy discomfort of the world as a reminder to keep faith firm, and the chill of cold water as a marker of the new life that is to come: even Solomon 'likens faithfulness to the cold of snow, and good news to a draught of cold water [Proverbs 25. 13, 25]' (p.60). Earth's Siberian climate, then, reanimates the believer's faith even as it is jarred and questioned and, most importantly, invokes the fall of snow that serves to cover up and reserve the very faith it initially awakens.

Rossetti's portrait of the snow in *Seek and Find* is the most powerful in her list of icy themes, rendering, as I suggest above, reserve in all its elegance and mystery. 'The beauty of snow,' Rossetti begins, 'needs no proof. Perfect in whiteness, feathering in lightness, it often floats down with hesitation as if it belonged to air rather than to earth: yet once resting on that ground it seemed loath to touch, it silently and surely accomplishes its allotted task: it fills up chasms, levels inequalities, cloaks imperfections' and so on (p.64). Such a description pertains as much to the doctrine of reserve as it does to snow. As snow drifts down from above, not really belonging on earth, so reserve marks the word of God, only to be repelled by the contemporary church as a archaic abhorrence. Yet as the snow comes to sit easily on the surface it seemed

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discussion of the same themes.

alien to, so reserve will be accepted as a natural part of the Christian faith, filling up intellectual chasms in an ignorant church system, levelling inequality between believers by reserving all their faiths, and cloaking the imperfections of the believer before God. The emphasis on snow's gentle silence and almost reverent quality too parallels reserve, transforming the world into a respectful and ethereal utopia where all is equalized by a sparkling blanket of whiteness. As Rossetti implies in 'A Christmas Carol' (*P*, 1875), the frosty world, always in a 'bleak mid-winter' where snow has fallen 'snow on snow, Snow on snow,' presents the believer with a buried, unfathomable feeling of whiteness (ll.1, 6). So many layers of snow hide away the earth and the damage humanity has inflicted upon it as a signal to the believer that she must cover up her faith and intellectual study of God's secrets, protecting them from a world that has already destroyed his creation.

Winter, snow, ice and cold, then, all signify a reserved faith, awakening the believer's holiness, testing its intellectual foundations and finally announcing heaven's dazzling and white beauty. As the season to end all seasons, winter marks the believer's entrance into heaven, an era of expectancy and excitement that can only be halted by the continuation of mortal life into spring, a dangerous time claiming to reveal, rather than veil, God's glory through the propagation of new life. As the narrator of 'Winter: My Secret' is aware, only on 'some languid summer day' might the 'secret' be guessed, fatal for the unprepared whose ignorant confrontation with God might lead 'to the great injury of their moral character,' as Williams noted, or worse ('Winter: My Secret,' ll.28, 33-34; 'On Reserve,' V:8, p.78). Rossetti thus consistently longs for winter-time as in "'Who hath despised the day of small things?'" (V), the 'sweetening wintry air' preferred to spring's 'half-awakened' laziness which 'lags incomplete' when compared to its predecessor (l.5). The poem 'Spring' (*GMOP*) also focuses on its fleeting splendour, a season 'Now newly born, and now | Hastening to die,' transitory and erratic unlike the 'Frost-locked' nature of winter (ll.38-39, 1). 'A Birthday' (*GMOP*) perhaps most explicitly betrays spring's lurid and shabby display of decomposing colour,

overwhelming the reader with images of the vernal season, trees hanging heavy with fruit, rainbow coloured shells abounding in an effervescent ocean and various exotic birds glittering in the light.<sup>51</sup> Such lavishness, however, owns none of the aesthetic beauty of Catholic ritual because of its capacity for decay – fruit, blossoms and other budding growth ultimately withering away in hotter weather.<sup>52</sup>

The dangers of rotting pulp are clear in ‘Goblin Market’ (*GMOP*), and ‘A Birthday’ only returns Rossetti to the purity of whiteness at its close, the vitality of Spring abandoned for a more fixed portrayal of life within a wood carving upon a dais (ll.9-13). The pattern, worked ‘in gold and silver grapes, | In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys,’ locks the inert imitations of life within a metallic frame of silvery whiteness which in turn inspires the narrator’s prayer. Celebrating her ultimate birthday, the day she enters heaven, the believer conjures an image of Christ as lover welcoming the believer within his wintry wonderland: ‘the birthday of my life | Is come, my love is come to me’ she states (ll.13-16). The reader is thus reassured that overcast cold removes the spoils of warmer seasons (as Lizzie warns Laura, ‘clouds may gather | Tho’ this is summer weather’) obliterating a disintegrating world to portend the white-gold sparkle of Jerusalem (‘Goblin Market,’ ll.249-250). While spring escorts life into the world, winter allows its exit into the sparking realm of heaven where all the muddy blemishes of earth are bleached from the believer who finally reaches whiteness. As Rossetti cries in “‘They shall be as white as snow’” (V): ‘Ah, to be clean again | In mine own sight and God’s most holy sight!’ struggling desperately to ‘reach thro’ any flood or fire of pain | Whiteness most white’ (ll.1-4). So too in *Letter and Spirit* is it clear that the process by which winter guides the believer into heaven is necessarily a cleansing one which must not be interrupted by spring’s flush: ‘Purity is like snow which a warm contact diminishes if it does not actually sully’ (p.101).

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<sup>51</sup> Such description provoked one critic to declare ‘A Birthday’ the most vivid depiction of ‘the pictorial splendours of the Pre-Raphaelite school,’ Arthur Christopher Benson, ‘Christina Rossetti,’ *The National Review*, 26 (1895), in Charles, *Christina Rossetti*, p.42.



The believer instead must fashion her faith like a snow-covered landscape, hidden from unbelievers and frozen in a state of continual purity and cleanliness. Rossetti begs God to absolve her in order that her body and spirit remain always ready to ascend into heaven and access God's secrets: 'Lord make me pure' she calls in a poem of the same name, for 'Only the pure shall see Thee as Thou art' ('Lord, make me pure' [V], ll.1-2). Similarly, in 'What would I Give?' (*PP*) Rossetti longs for 'scalding tears, | To wash the black mark clean, and to thaw the frost of years,' betraying her anxiety to come 'clean again' and have the icy marks of her final season on earth melt away (l.8-9). Such vehemence of expression has caused Jan Marsh to read Rossetti's craving for cleanliness as a metaphor of child-abuse, using 'A Convent Threshold' (*GMOP*) as an example.<sup>53</sup> Here, the narrator struggles to become 'clean' after her 'lily feet' have been 'soiled' with 'scarlet mud,' and yet it is to the 'clean Angels' that she cries to try and 'lave her soul' and 'wash the spot,' reinstating her need for purity as predominantly religious rather than sexual (ll.7-8, 14, 58-59). To walk in white once in heaven requires a pure demeanour as well as a pure soul, a necessity which inflicted an anxious desire on Rossetti to be rid of earth's putrid and rank sins. Such guilt, however, was perhaps not caused by sexual abuse, but by a sense of unworthiness that provoked the poet to feel ill-prepared and unclean for entrance into the shimmering and pure realm of heaven.

To conclude this chapter, I will offer a reading of 'From House to Home' (*GMOP*) as a summary of the above themes – winter, whiteness, cleanliness and purity – all signifying Rossetti's interest in reserving religious knowledge. The poem is recited by a female narrator to her friend as she tells of her encounters with two angelic spirits who she claims have reconfirmed her formerly fragile faith by putting her through various tests. The day-dreams begin in the distinctly worldly and profane realm of her

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<sup>52</sup> Rossetti's use of lavish imagery reveals her familiarity with the poetic theory of E. S. Dallas as she uses emotion to enhance poetic quality, see Lynda Palazzo, 'Christina Rossetti's "A Birthday": Representations of the Poetic,' *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 7:2 (1987), 94-96 (p.94).

<sup>53</sup> Jan Marsh argues that Rossetti may have been subjected to 'incestuous abuse of some kind,' offering an 'explanation of the dark and disturbed aspects of her inner life that would account for her teenage breakdown, personality change, inexplicable rages and recurrent depression,' in Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1994), p.260.

'pleasure-place,' a term rendering her intemperate soul, the first 'like a dream through summer heat' and 'the second like a tedious numbing swoon,' evoking a warmth opposed to the white iciness of Rossetti's heaven (ll.1-2). Such heat obliterates any trace of the narrator's already brittle, unlearned and undependable faith, represented in verse four by a majestic white castle, 'Glittering and frail with many a fretted spire,' but destroyed by fire in the 'summer sunset' (ll.14-15). In its place stands the narrator's dreamy 'pleasure-place,' an 'earthly paradise' which lures her 'from the goal' of heaven and teases her with 'hugged lies' that withhold her from following the Christian path (l.9). She is thus forced to interpret her world in romanticized and generic terms, a depiction presented between verses five and eleven that inevitably rings false and is only halted by the arrival of 'one like an angel,' the first of God's phantom-like messengers.

At once fiery and oceanic, commanding yet spiritual, the ghost seems 'sometimes like a snow drift' and 'sometimes like a sunset' to the narrator, transcending environmental barriers because sent from God (ll.49-50). The narrator befriends him and eventually comes to love him, the two singing and communing by day and 'so in dreams by night,' and yet she is unable to remember any of the details of their liaison at this point in the poem (l.56). She states: 'I have no words to tell what way we walked, | What unforgotten path now closed and sealed; | I have no words to tell all things we talked, | All things that he revealed,' unprepared to receive such spiritual mysteries and so blocked from them by reserve (ll.57-60). The angel's status as a specifically reserved messenger means that he can only continue their relationship in the 'distant land' of heaven, a place she is unable to journey to as an unbelieving victim of her worldly home (l.76). She is left alone when the angel departs feeling only the night bearing upon her 'like an avalanche,' smothered by an icy blanket she is unable to understand as the white wintry presence of the Christian God (l.77). The narrator is frozen by such bitterness, faithless and so unenlightened by the angel's revelations or God's signals and unable to pray, falling unconscious to the 'frost-bound floor' moaning farewell to her lover (l.100, 102).

As her life slips away, she distantly apprehends the voices of ‘spheres and spirits’ who discuss what to do with this now inert body, one wishing to let her go as an unbeliever into Hades, the other answering, “‘Not so: she must live again; | Strengthen thou her to live’” (ll.111-112). Bewildered but comforted by these debating angels, the narrator slowly begins to slowly regain her faith, entering a trance-like realm, evocative of the silent study space. Within, she sees a screen-like ‘curtain’ shrivel fierily before her eyes, its ‘waxing radiance’ revealing heaven’s white glow to disclose God’s message (ll.113-116).<sup>54</sup> The light also unveils a ‘vision of a woman [ . . . ] Incomparably pale, and almost fair, | And sad beyond expression,’ the second phantasmal spirit who has been sent by God to serve as an example to the newly converted narrator (ll.117, 119-120). The female apparition draws the narrator to her with ‘fire-enshrining’ eyes shining ‘like the stars,’ recalling the light leading the shepherds to Bethlehem and so reinforcing the metaphor of religious guidance (l.121-122). Yet as she moves closer to the spirit, the narrator observes that she is poised within a kind of magical circle, around which dance a number of enchanted, yet threatening, thorny flowers. The scene is thrown into a manic and unsettling atmosphere as ‘hoarse laughter’ peals down ‘in scorn’ around the spirit, the flowers shooting through her feet to score the vision with blood and sorrow (ll.131-133). The phantom is lifted from such pain only when the more godly of the debating angels, ‘anchored fast in heaven,’ reaches down to her, and causes the horror to subside (l.140).

As the second, ever-doubting debating angel questions the spirit’s capacity to survive this ordeal, it becomes clear that two forces are at work in the narrator’s dreams, one confirming the fortitude of the godly soul, the other mistrusting it. The subject may believe or challenge God, the narrator suggests, but only the first option lifts one clear of earthly pain, allowing her to “‘Rend the veil’” of God’s secrets and enter heaven (l.159).

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<sup>54</sup> This visionary occurrence has much in common with Gerald Brun’s description of God as an aspect of the imagination, His laws communicated silently in a way which only those who believe may hear: ‘God’s words can only be expressed in the form of a secret, or only by means of a veiling that serves the double function of revelation and protection, as in the story of the radiant curtain: it is the hiding of the light



God's Judgement Day revelations appear only when all human knowledge is annihilated, 'Time and space, change and death' erased and 'Weight, number, measure' all added up and then discarded, 'rolled up like a scroll' to be kept as a brief record of earthly perception (ll.162-163, 161). A mammoth communion marks the occasion, 'Multitudes – multitudes' standing up 'in bliss' to partake of the 'new wine' as angelic music plays and all are 'crowned and haloed' with God's blessing (ll.165, 171, 168). Rising in frenzied prayer, the numbers of believers invoke a terrifying sublimity, at last bursting into flames like Rossetti's crystal castle, but this time because of their collective fervour. Forever unknown to the material world, 'no tongue' can ever 'disclose' the 'secret sacred names' of the multitude, connoting unequivocal reticence to enforce the magnanimity of such an astonishing spectacle (ll.175-176).<sup>55</sup> The female spectre is finally 'lifted up' to God along with the narrator she has guided, removed from her thorny torment and taking on a sheen of whiteness along with the other redeemed believers (l.196). Like little moons of radiance, the multitudes shine 'New-lit with love and praise' as exemplar to the narrator and her patient friend who listens throughout the tale, the former resolved that 'my soul shall walk in white' like the rest of the citizens of New Jerusalem she sees so vividly in her religious visions (l.200).

Lifting her 'hanging hands' up to pray and lowering her 'feeble knees' in genuflection, the narrator now welcomes the effects of winter, content to 'fade as doth a leaf' and languish away like a stunted plant (ll.213-220). She subsists on the nourishment communion blood provides, a point that reveals her fresh attendance at church, and waits patiently until the day of reckoning when she may 'put forth buds again | And clothe' herself 'with fruit' in paradise (ll.222-224). The closing of the poem, once again, reinforces the importance of a studious and steadfast faith as the narrator

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which enables us to know its presence,' in Gerald Bruns, *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), p.18.

<sup>55</sup> As Sissela Bok remarks, the sacred and the secret are linked through a status which proclaims them private but seductive, combining 'the daunting and the fascinating, dread and allure,' in Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (New York: Vintage, 1989), p.6; Bok also argues that the word 'sacred' can be conveyed by the Latin word for 'secret,' *arcanum*; see also Irén Lovász, 'Sacred Language and Secret Speech,' *Ethnologia Uralica*, 3 (1992), 39-44.

simply asserts that she will 'stay upon my God,' a powerful line by virtue of its clarity in a poem wild with metaphor, reverie and passion (l.228). The stability that marks the end of 'From House to Home' comes about because the narrator is willing to learn, intellectually and devotionally understanding what God promises in heaven and so able to interpret winter as heaven's shadow. Indeed, by writing of winter in this way, Rossetti proves her own intellectual ability to decipher scripture, withdrawing such display into a reserved faith for fear of expressing vanity before God.

Rossetti's reservation of her theological knowledge in her poetry and prose may mislead the secular reader into deeming her naïve and simple, then, but for the initiated, her status as a thinker is prevalent. Where Brontë suggested that religion stifled and oppressed intellectual thought, Rossetti illustrates that the believer cannot properly assume a Christian identity without founding it upon a religious education. The clerical role Rossetti assumes in her poetry forges her narrative voice as intellectual and instructive, allowing the believer to penetrate her thoughtful rhetoric, and encouraging the unbeliever to study in order to understand her theological references. While reserve instructed the believer to express religious thoughts only figuratively, I have argued, it also demanded that the receiver of such information was able to register its content. Seemingly beneficial only to an elite of theological specialists, reserve rather encouraged everyone to access religious truth. Tractarianism's emphasis upon reserve thus advocated religious education for all, and Rossetti's poetry, superficially manageable and lucid, opened theology to a general readership. Such a manoeuvre was essential for Rossetti, who as a Tractarian believed that without religious knowledge as well as faith, the believer could not ever fully communicate with God.

On a deeper level, however, her poetry and prose parallels the scholarly writings of Keble, Newman, Pusey and Williams, and portrays a religious intellectual whose ability to interpret scripture and comment upon doctrine was beyond that of many contemporary preachers and theologians. It is a distinctly educated faith that Rossetti evinces, and the religious authenticity her poetry expresses imbues it with an aesthetic

clarity Brontë's verse lacks. Serving only to supplement the 'sure utterance of inspiration' within scripture, Rossetti professed in *Called to be Saints*, I would contend that her poetry remained equal to it in influence throughout the nineteenth century (p.25). Moving many writers to reassess their faith, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Michael Field, Arthur Symons and Ford Madox Ford, for example, Rossetti claimed an intellectual voice that other thinkers recognized and praised.<sup>56</sup> By creating an aesthetic space within the poem in which the believer could think, and then urging her to reserve such meditation, Rossetti advocated a form of religious contemplation worthy of the clerical intellectual. As a thinker, Rossetti is inseparable from Tractarianism, then, forging as it did her identity as a religious scholar, as she advocated its belief-system, her poetry as evocative of the incense-filled atmosphere of the church as the monastic library of the theologian.

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<sup>56</sup> On Rossetti's influence on Hopkins, see Margaret Johnson, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and Tractarian Poetry* (Aldershot and Vermont: Ashgate, 1997); Michael Field published a sonnet addressing Rossetti in 1896, 'To Christina Rossetti'; Arthur Symons noted that the 'liturgical character' of Rossetti's poetry was enhanced by the 'personal emotion' expressed within it, so that 'it is scarcely to be read without a shudder,' in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), in Jan Marsh, ed. *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose* (London: Everyman, 1994), p.465; and on Rossetti's profound effect upon Ford, see Grover Smith's 'Ford Madox Ford and the Christina Rossetti Influence,' *English Literature in Transition*, 29:3 (1986), 287-296.



## Afterword

In the course of this thesis, I have demonstrated the manner in which both Brontë and Rossetti forged an intellectual identity through their literary responses to religion. I claimed that the reader who focuses upon the religious elements of their poetry and prose can reveal the religious and philosophical material with which they respectively engaged. Moreover, I suggested, by tracing Brontë and Rossetti's opinions concerning faith and doubt, the reader may begin to decipher their various constructions of the nineteenth-century female thinker.

Brontë, I argued, struggled against her predominantly Methodist environment, critiquing it from within like the Saidian intellectual. Manipulating an enthusiastic rhetoric associated with revivalist religion, Brontë presented the believer as one coerced into irrational and frenzied behaviour under the sway of a tyrannical God. Christianity is thus rendered in Brontë's writing as an oppressive and imprisoning belief-system by which the subject is overwhelmed and ultimately imprisoned. I suggested that in betraying religion's power to exercise control, however, Brontë is also overcome by its ideology, unable to free her writing from a religious frame of reference. Her enthused narrators remain bound by religion whether inside prison, a metaphor of Christianity itself, or wandering the landscape of Gondal, regulated and repressed by a God consistently portrayed as hateful and despotic. Infused with an enthusiastic fervour, however, Brontë's poetical voice emerges as one impassioned and angry, radically dismissive of the religious values it remains locked within. Such a voice is specifically intellectual for two reasons, I contended: first, it is scholarly, informed by a rhetoric of enthusiasm and sublimity Brontë learned through reading Methodist sermons and philosophical texts; and second, it is challenging, working to mobilize Brontë's readership into recognizing the authoritarian nature of religion in a still Christian society. Refusing always to conform to God's rules, Brontë's narrator has no objective other than to render orthodox religion destructive, even as she cannot release herself

from its values. The cries of insane despair that echo from the prison-poems are particularly evocative of Brontë's own frustration at being unable to jettison religion, granting, as it did, an ardent and emotional expression to her writing. As I have suggested, however, Brontë's inability to unconditionally oppose religion and free herself from its language and values renders her poetry perplexing and her intellectual status compromised.

By contrast, I claimed that Rossetti's intellectual status, acknowledged by nineteenth-century criticism where Brontë's was not, is authorized by religion and thus served to uphold Christian values. For Rossetti, the intellect was advanced by religious study, rather than curbed by it, and she argued that religious education was essential for the believer who hoped to reach heaven. While the full meaning of God's word, as evinced in scripture and through the writings of the Fathers, could never be grasped outside of heaven, Rossetti urged her readers to prepare for the ultimate revelation by studying religious texts. As a result, I argued, Rossetti used her poetry as a location in which to create a silent study space for the reader by evoking the ritual atmosphere of the church interior, a model realm in which to think and concentrate. By educating oneself through biblical and other religious works, notably those of the Church Fathers and the *Tracts for the Times*, the believer may begin to understand the basic content of God's message. Basic as this was, such knowledge still had to be reserved, the Tractarians ruled, and thus Rossetti consistently reminds her reader to hide from the unbeliever what she has learned. Faced with religious truths she has little respect for, the unbeliever necessarily misinterprets God's messages and so damages both her chances for redemption on Judgement Day, and the dissemination of God's word in its true sense. The faithful, then, must reserve their religious knowledge, and Rossetti simultaneously exemplifies this process, as she underlines the importance of holding back God's counsel. Hence, the poet referenced reserve in a notably reserved manner, figuring the doctrine through metaphor and allegory in a manner according with Tractarian poetics. Rossetti's poetical voice is intellectual, then, both because it

interprets complex theological doctrine, and because it deems thinking about God almost as important as believing in him. The poet's role as an intellectual, then, parallels that of the Tractarian church chaplain, guiding his laity morally as he served them intellectually through instructive and scholarly sermons.

For the modern reader, however, Rossetti's identity as an intellectual may seem conservative, safely embraced by a Tractarian belief-system and productive of a writing style overly pious and very traditional. Rossetti may have been recognized by nineteenth-century society as a profound theological commentator where Brontë was not, but current readers tend to grant the latter a more romanticized and heroic intellectual persona as one who challenged an oppressive and domineering ideology. I conclude, however, that by interpreting the poetry of both women as revelatory of their intellectual relationships to religious ideology, the reader may find Rossetti's discussion more clearly evocative of her thinking nature. Portrayed as a reserved exposition of Tractarian belief, I suggest, Rossetti's devotional verse relates neither to the vacuous effusions of the keepsake book, nor the confused anger of Brontë's Gondal saga. It instead carefully addresses God through a poetical voice that submits before him, but uses such submission as a justification for women's education, implicitly feminist, then, as well as intellectual. Readers may be baffled before such sacred declarations, reaching instead to secular interpretive frames to decipher Rossetti's poetry, but I argue that one cannot ignore Tractarianism if intent on deconstructing her figurative and metaphorical language. I suggest too that the religious authenticity of Rossetti's experience is good for her poetry, rather than repressive, making for a canon that invites the reader to engage intellectually with its subject matter. Brontë's poetry is less satisfying, I think, because the poet herself is locked into a quandary concerning religious issues, aware that such issues fuel her mind but concerned that they limit it at the same time. Hence, her poetry as a whole tends to alienate the reader in search of a Brontëan philosophy, as it forces the critic to forever link it to *Wuthering Heights* or divorce it from Gondal.



I am aware that to herald Rossetti's 'authentic' religious experience disrupts the modern suspicion of any concept associated with 'truth.' Criticism so often renders religious faith as a mask for secular desires, or as an obstruction preventing the subject from fulfilling them. Yet I contend that even Rossetti's secular references are always confined within the parameters of Tractarianism, and her poetical voice rarely strays from asserting a belief presented as 'pure,' and so genuine. As thinkers like Arnold, Hopkins and Tennyson composed tormented verse that exposed their wavering commitment to Christianity, Rossetti's remained steadfast, plagued by doubts that she would not reach heaven, rather than that there would be no heaven to reach. Favouring the latter trauma as reflective of a current indifference to matters of faith within literature, criticism must readdress the fervent, but thoughtful Christian belief of writers like Rossetti. Instead of deferring Rossetti's religious identity into psychological fields of inquiry that render the poet abused and victimized, criticism must reclaim her as an equal to male theologians and link her to other Tractarian female intellectuals, such as Felicia Skene and Charlotte M. Yonge. By doing so, one might begin to recognize a tradition of nineteenth-century women's devotional writing that is at once thoughtful, provocative and formative of a thinking female identity. Embracing more women than the kind of man of letters role Collini envisions, one open only to 'exceptional individuals like George Eliot or Mrs Humphrey Ward,' such an identity looks forward to the rigorous work of religious intellectuals like Simone Weil and Mary Daly. Within the field of nineteenth-century studies, however, the category of the religious thinker may prove to highlight the engagement of many overlooked women writers with religious debate, and so complexify the Victorian intellectual role, still regarded as secular and male.

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